



The Fair Moon of Bath

By

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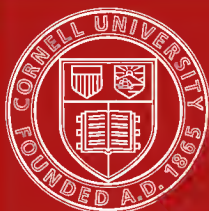
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“THE FAIR MOON OF BATH”

♥♥♥ Celia

Winnington



JOHN RAE



*“The Fair Moon
of Bath”*

By

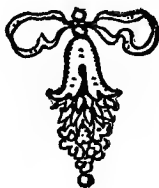
ELIZABETH ELLIS

Author of

“Barbara Winslow, Rebel”

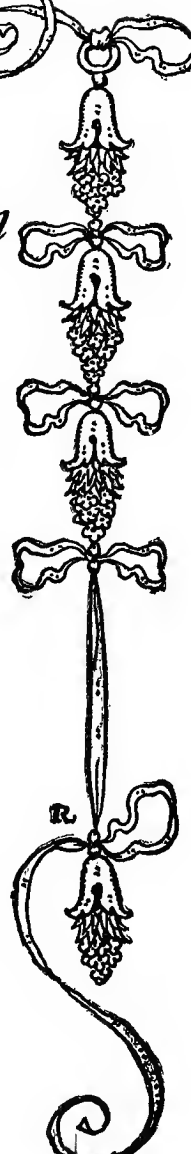
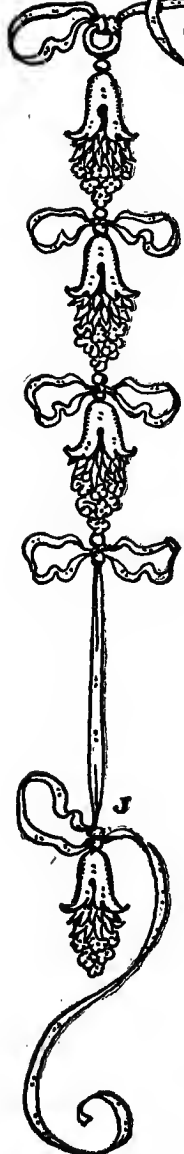
FRONTISPIECE
BY JOHN RAE

*“The precious things put forth
by the Moon”*



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THE FAIR MOON OF BATH

CHAPTER I

THE MIDSUMMER MOON

MR. TIMOTHY CURTIS rode slowly through the still night, and with half-seeing eyes watched the white road to the west unroll itself before him under the light of the midsummer moon. His brows were drawn together in a dark frown, and his face wore a look of deep dejection most unusual with this happy mortal. For Timothy Curtis, though hampered by the possession of what he considered a wholly inadequate income, was never one to waste time in counting his lacks. He brought to each draught of life a zest, which amply atoned for any want of savour in the cup, and deeming the possession of a strong sword-arm, a host of friends, and a wealthy uncle, whom Time might propitiate, sufficient riches for any man, he commonly won the smiles of Fortune by virtue of his persistent refusal to flinch at her frowns.

To-night, however, Timothy's wonted happy outlook on the world was clouded. He had ridden long, for to a light purse every unnecessary halt is an extravagance; he had ridden hungry since noon for the same reason; and he had ridden in solitude owing to his whimsical preference for a journey in the cool evening rather than in the dust and heat of the day. But none of these considerations was responsible for the melancholy that shadowed his soul.

Nor had the object of his journey appeared altogether

distasteful to him when viewed in the light of day. The pleasures of life as hitherto understood by Mr. Timothy Curtis must be purchased at a price; for ten years he had enjoyed them to the full, and now, when reckoning time had come, and he had no longer the wherewithal to meet the demand, he was journeying down to Bristol, at the command of his uncle, to bargain the graces of his impecunious person in exchange for the gold of a rich merchant's daughter.

When Lord Westerby's command reached his nephew in response to an urgent appeal for pecuniary assistance, Timothy was in no wise averse to the scheme; he was pressingly in need of money; he was, if truth must be told, considerably weary of the stock beauties of the town, and he had the utmost confidence in his uncle as a connoisseur of feminine charms. Consequently he set out upon his journey blithe of heart, anticipating no difficulty in his wooing, and confidently expecting to return to town in the space of three weeks the affianced husband of an heiress.

But now, as he rode through the scented silence of the night, the still magic of the midsummer moon fired his blood, the still strange light enchained him in a web of dreams. A yearning seized him for that touch of the unreal, of the romance which falls at times from heaven upon happy mortals and turns desert places to an Eden, and a longing awoke in his heart to find again his lost belief in a disinterested love, to place faith again in a woman worthy the offering.

For the moon may make a man a rascal or a hero, according to the secret thoughts of his own soul; but willy-nilly, she will make of him a lover if there be a touch of romance

in his nature to answer to her call; and his soul was filled with a divine discontent of himself, of his life, and, above all, of his errand.

Timothy lifted his eyes to the moon and blushed at his own shortcomings. To live year in and year out untouched by romance and unhallowed by devotion—it was the existence of a cow. And yet, surely, he argued, 'twas the Fates who were to blame, not he. His life was mapped out for him as was the life of his class; his feet were set upon the plain highway of life, and who would dream of meeting romance upon the hard highroad? If the Fates would have him play the man, let them send him the opportunity; he would not prove a laggard.

Timothy lifted his head defiantly and flung a challenge to the calm-faced moon; but even as he did so his horse shied and his eyes and thoughts came back to earth with unexpected speed. He turned to see what had frightened the animal, and with a stifled exclamation pulled up his horse, and in astonishment remained staring at the apparition which met his eyes.

On the sloping bank by the roadside, half shadowed by a little group of trees, lay a girl, fast asleep. She was wrapped in a handsome riding-cloak, her head was resting upon a pile of tapestried cushions, and on the tiny shoe that peeped below the hem of her brocaded skirt a small diamond buckle flashed in the shimmering light.

Timothy rubbed his eyes and looked again. The girl's hood had fallen back, revealing her face nestling against an aureole of amber-coloured hair; she seemed to Timothy very fair. He dismounted and crossed the road to her side. The moonbeams stole between the shadowy leaves and played about her form. He stood looking down on her in silence.

The dark lashes lay softly on the rounded cheeks; she was sleeping very quietly.

A sudden overwhelming desire seized him to learn the colour of her eyes. The lids were full, oval, fringed with dark lashes; the raising of such lids is as the drawing back of the curtains of the night. He longed to see them open, to gaze into the depths beneath. He had a fancy the eyes would be blue; it came upon him as a conviction they must be blue, but he wanted to see for himself.

She slept peacefully. Timothy looked at the rosy parted lips and drew in his breath; surely it was his prerogative. Then he dismissed the thought sternly, and kneeling beside her took her hand softly in his and pressed it to his lips. He lifted his head and nodded gravely to the moon.

"Thank you, Diana," he said whimsically; "a monstrous, promising beginning."

The girl's hand stirred in his; he lowered his glance and found himself gazing deep into a pair of dark eyes filled with a look of uttermost astonishment.

"Thank heaven! they are blue," he said, with satisfaction.

The position was not without its charm, but it was nevertheless embarrassing. Timothy dropped her hand quickly and rose to his feet.

"I—I beg your pardon, madam," he stammered; "I fear I have disturbed you."

The girl sat upright, and looked round in bewilderment. Then her eyes met his again, and she blushed crimson. She rose to her feet with a wonderful assumption of haughtiness.

"So you have come at last, sir," she said. "We are weary to death with waiting for you."

"Madam?" he stammered in surprise.

She looked up quickly. "Have you not come to our assistance? What brought you here, then?"

"My lucky star, I think, madam," he answered gravely.

She resolutely repressed a smile. "Ah, then I was mistaken. I deemed the servant had fetched you to our assistance." She paused and looked significantly at his horse. "This not being the case, I will not detain you, sir," she added, with a gesture of dismissal.

Timothy had no mind to obey her implied command.

"Surely, madam, as my star has led me here, you will accept my help," he argued. "I am entirely at your service."

She shook her head. "No, sir," she said calmly. "I thank you, but your company mislikes me. The sooner you ride on your way the better."

She spoke quietly, but there was a breathlessness in her voice and a look in her eyes that betokened fear.

Timothy grew more persistent. "What! ride away and leave you here in difficulty? Why, madam, for what do you take me?"

"For a gentleman of the road," she answered shortly. She lifted her arm and touched significantly a heavy gold bracelet of curious design which she wore on her wrist. "I deem myself fortunate that I awoke in time."

Timothy stared at her a moment in indignation, then he broke into a hearty laugh. "Good heavens, madam!" he cried, "you don't imagine I intended to steal your jewel?"

"Indeed, I know no other explanation of your—er—your attitude when I awoke," she said hesitatingly.

Timothy flushed. "I assure you upon my honour, madam, your suspicions are unfounded. I am as honest as—as the highroad. My name is Timothy Curtis, and——"

“Timothy Curtis!” she exclaimed. “Lord Westerby’s nephew?” She paused and eyed him doubtfully. “It is easy to learn if that be true,” she said, and began to walk rapidly down the road.

Timothy followed her, leading his horse. A few yards further the road turned abruptly to the right. At the corner the girl paused and looked back at him.

“If you are Mr. Curtis, my sister will know you,” she said. “If not, the sooner you ride off the better.”

The menacing tone of her voice was somewhat belied by the frightened look in her eyes and the nervous clasp of her white hands. Timothy smiled at her reassuringly.

They turned the corner of the road together, and he gave an exclamation of surprise and comprehension. On the side of the road, half leaning against the bank, was a heavy travelling coach, the wheel that lay beside it giving at once the key to the disaster. The horses, unharnessed, were tethered near, while a man-servant, half asleep, sat on a log beside them, clutching a heavy pistol in either hand. The door of the coach stood open; a couple of cushions, a cloak and a fan lay scattered on the road beside it. On the steps of the coach a pretty, pert-looking waiting-maid sat bolt upright staring at the moon, her face wearing an expression of supreme disapprobation. She turned at their approach and rose primly to her feet, glancing at Timothy with the same look of fear and suspicion which he had seen on the face of her mistress.

The girl looked quickly round the group.

“Where is your mistress?” she asked abruptly.

Even as she spoke the figure of a woman appeared from beyond the coach and hurried eagerly toward them. She was tall, and bore herself with supreme grace and dignity.

Her features were beautiful, almost frigid in their regularity; her complexion was very fair. She wore the heavy masses of her dark hair rippling back from her brow in a fashion as unique in those days of pads and powder as it was eminently becoming to the oval of her face. She had the air of one well accustomed to receive men's homage, but in no wise despising it, while the steadfast look in her dark-grey eyes betokened a greater strength of character than her gentle manner would otherwise have led a man to expect.

Her eyes were eager, her face flushed with excitement as she hurried forward to meet her sister.

"Who is this, Celia?" she cried. "What has happened?"

Timothy stepped eagerly past his companion, and bowed before the advancing figure.

"Lady Wimbourne, by all that's marvellous!" he cried gaily. "Sure! but I shall be the envied of all St. James's for this. To find you in difficulty, and have the sole right of rescue, is more than a man would dare to ask of the Fates."

The flush died from her cheeks and the light from her eyes, and for a moment she faced him with a look of blank disappointment. It was not a gratifying reception, and Timothy felt his self-esteem ebbing fast. Moreover, he was conscious that the younger sister was watching him with critical eyes, marking how he bore himself under this ordeal.

Lady Wimbourne was the first to recover herself. She bit her lip, smiled faintly, and extended her hand in greeting.

"You are most welcome, Mr. Curtis," she said graciously. "What brings you on the road at this unusual hour? Are

you journeying to Bath, like all the rest of the world, or have you taken to night-riding? If the latter, we must look to our purses."

"Nay, madam, your sister has already accused me of dishonest intentions. We are here that you may allay her suspicions and present me in due form."

Lady Wimbourne looked at her sister's blushing face and gave a low, musical laugh.

"What, child! you took him for a follower of Duval, eh? Small wonder, too, at this hour of the night. And what hath he taken?"

The answer to that was what Celia wished to know. She was conscious that her awakening had come a moment too late.

"My sister, Mr. Curtis," continued Lady Wimbourne, "is somewhat new to the world; she made her *début* but a week ago. She has not yet learned to distinguish betwixt rogues and honest men."

"I' faith, madam, when she has learned that lesson she will be, I trust, a grandmother. But in what way can my poor services assist your ladyship?" he continued briskly, turning to the overturned coach.

"In none, sir, unless you be a wheelwright," answered Lady Wimbourne quickly. "I have sent my servant on to Newbury to bring some fashion of conveyance. He should return at any moment."

"But we have waited two hours already, Adelaide," interposed her sister, "and he does not come. If this—if Mr. Curtis will give us his services, I, for one, will most gratefully accept. You know, Laidie," she added apologetically, "I am hungry."

"But nothing can be done," interrupted Adelaide impa-

tiently. "Nothing avails but patience. You know, Mr. Curtis," she continued, turning to Timothy, "Tracy is still held prisoner in town with his broken leg; but he would not hear of our waiting till he be fit to travel. So we are journeying to Bath without him, and never did two poor unfortunates suffer greater disasters. An hour after we set out my groom fell ill, and we were forced to leave him at a house by the wayside with a servant to tend him. At noon to-day, when we halted at Reading, my second groom disappeared, and after waiting some hours we were obliged to come on without him. At six o' the clock one of the horses fell lame, and we must needs proceed at walking pace; and now—now this pestilent wheel has deceived us, and we are tossed out on to the roadside for all the world like a sack of potatoes. Were ever two poor innocents more maltreated by the Fates?"

She spoke lightly, but her eyes were restless and her fingers worked nervously together. Ever and anon she turned to look down the road, and twice she stopped short in a sentence and listened eagerly. Timothy regarded her curiously; her present anxiety was a marked contrast to her customary placid manner.

"In truth, Lady Wimbourne," he said gallantly, "your misfortunes are assuredly due to the malign influence of my lucky star. That being so, let me repair the injury and escort you to a place of shelter. There's a village but a mile to the south; why not walk there? Or, better still, ride my mare? The inn is poor, but it could provide us with a supper and better protection than the highroad. Does my plan take you?"

"Lud! we are little better than fools, Adelaide," laughed Celia. "We might have done this an hour ago."

“And have deprived me of the inestimable pleasure of escorting you,” interposed Timothy. “Gad! madam, that would have been too plaguy selfish.”

Adelaide looked from one to the other with puckered brows.

“No,” she said quickly, “we—we will remain here. It were wiser. The groom must return presently. Indeed, I would prefer it.”

“It is not safe for you to remain here alone,” he argued impatiently. “The roads are infested with vagabonds. Tracy would never forgive me if I left you. Come, madam, consent; I swear the inn is not so bad, and if all else fails, I am reckoned a passable cook myself.”

But she pressed her hands tightly together in distress, and looked from side to side as though seeking escape from his importunity.

“I will remain here,” she muttered obstinately. “Indeed, sir, you distress me by this insistence. I pray you, begone and leave us.”

Timothy, annoyed at her obstinacy, could say no more, and turned to mount his horse. But here the younger sister intervened. She laid her hand shyly on his arm to detain him.

“No, Mr. Curtis,” she said resolutely; “we are going with you.” Then she turned to Adelaide. “’Twould seem the moon has turned you crazy, Laidie. Here has this gentleman, whom you have just assured me is an honest man, propounded a scheme for our comfort so simple that we never even thought of it; in heaven’s name, then, what sense lies in refusing it? We will go.”

Adelaide bit her lip and eyed her sister nervously.

“You do not understand, child,” she began nervously.

"No, I do not," responded Celia quietly. "And if 'tis our reputations you would consider, I tell you plainly, Laidie, I prefer my supper. Come, Laidie," she coaxed, "I am going with Mr. Curtis, so 'tis your bounden duty to play the duenna."

"No, no," cried Adelaide desperately. Then she broke off abruptly and walked hurriedly to the bend in the road. She lifted her hands to her eyes and looked out along the white track for a minute or two in silence. When she returned to the others her face was white, but her manner had regained its customary composure.

"You are right, dear," she said; "we will go with Mr. Curtis. Tracy would wish it. Come, Martha, help that fellow to put our mails on the horses."

They all set to work rapidly on their preparations, and in less than ten minutes were on their way. Timothy led the pack-horses and Adelaide rode his mare, while Celia walked by her side with her arm through the bridle. The maid Martha, sad of face and prim of mien, brought up the rear.

They reached the inn about midnight, and with some trouble procured within half an hour a supper not wholly unworthy of the appetites with which they attacked it.

Their spirits rallied considerably as the meal progressed. Adelaide was the most silent of the three, but even she made a fair attempt to throw aside the anxiety which seemed to oppress her, and rallied her sister playfully about her youth and the wonders she expected from this first visit to Bath.

"Happy child," she sighed, "to stand at the threshold of life and dream that a romance lurks beneath every rose-bush."

Celia blushed and gave a wise little smile.

"Indeed, Laidie," she said softly, "I had rather dream that all my life than believe, as some of your town gallants profess to do, that all romance died out of the world a thousand years ago. If life holds neither romance, love, nor honour, I had as lief not live at all."

Timothy turned and looked into her eyes with a quick smile.

"Did the moon teach you that, madam?" he said whimsically. "Dame Diana——"

A stifled exclamation from Adelaide stopped him. He looked up to see her gazing over his shoulder with parted lips and eyes wide with eagerness.

He turned in his chair to learn the cause of her surprise. Behind him, framed in the open doorway, stood a tall, dark man, booted and spurred. He wore a long, many-caped riding-coat and a wide three-cornered hat, on the brim of which were pinned a couple of white roses. He scanned the party with mild surprise, but no particular interest.

Timothy turned sharply back to Adelaide. Her face was calm and void of all interest in the stranger.

"How vastly sweet these flowers smell," she said conversationally, pointing to a bowl of roses in the centre of the table. "I protest our hostess must forgive a theft."

Leaning forward, she selected two white roses from the nosegay and pinned them in her bosom.

There was a clatter in the doorway. Wheeling round, Timothy saw that the stranger had dropped his sword. He stooped to pick it up, and then, with a polite "Good-evening," turned and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER II

NOON-DAY

THE short summer night waned slowly, the moon sank and died in a bed of fleecy cloud, and the first pale grey of dawn lightened the eastern sky, but Adelaide Wimbourne never closed her eyes. She suffered her maid to undress her, indeed, and lay down beside her sister, making pretence to rest; but as soon as Celia was asleep she rose and dressed quickly, tucking her hair into the hood of her travelling cloak, and drawing the cloak around her to hide all deficiencies in her toilette. Then she opened the door of her room and listened intently.

No sound was heard save the creaking of wood in the old floors and the heavy breathing of the other sleepers. She stole to the head of the stairway and peered down, but all was dark and silent. With a sigh and look of disappointment she hurried back to her room, and there paced softly to and fro in ever-increasing hesitation and perplexity.

At last, about three o'clock, a sense of impotent despair overmastered her. She opened her window and leaned her head against the window frame and allowed the ready tears to trickle down her cheeks unrestrained, until, in utter weariness, she fell asleep.

She was awakened suddenly by the touch of something cold and wet upon her hand, and looking down, she saw on her knee a bunch of roses wet with dew. Springing to her feet, she leaned out of the open window, and dimly dis-

cerned the figure of a man standing below beckoning to her. With eager face she stole across the room, throwing an anxious glance at Celia, who still slumbered peacefully, and slipped through the door.

At the foot of the stairs the stranger of the previous evening awaited her. He motioned her to precede him into the room where they had supped, which was already dimly illumined with the pale light of morning. She obeyed him without hesitation, and turned to him a face bright with relief and happiness.

“You are Captain McFee?” she asked. “Oh! why did you fail me last night? I have suffered such misery. I feared I had missed you entirely until I saw you at supper.”

The man’s stern face relaxed a little at sight of her eagerness. He was tall and dark, with the air of a soldier, and spoke in the brusque tone of one accustomed to command.

“Indeed, madam, ’twas not I who failed you. I waited for two hours after time at the appointed place, ready to play the highwayman as Sir Tracy directed—though a more foolishly conceived plot I never heard of,” he added impatiently.

Adelaide flushed. “You mistake, sir,” she said with dignity. “The plot was not to blame. How else could I meet you and receive the papers without exciting my sister’s suspicions? And all was going well. I had rid me of three of the servants and delayed our journey till nightfall, when that pestilent wheel came off the coach and ruined our plans. I sent my man on ahead to find and warn you, but you never came.”

“He did not reach me, madam. ’Tis the merest chance I find you here. I did but come back to fetch my mails and set off for the coast in despair of seeing you. And I would

have left again without knowing you had you not given me the signal."

Adelaide smiled. "I deserve some commendation for that forethought, at least," she pleaded. "But now give me the papers. My sister may wake any moment; she must not find me flown. You see I, too, have risks to encounter."

Again his face softened. "You risk much, madam," he said gently. "There is no more devoted adherent of the cause than yourself. We know it well. For myself, I would have no woman in this affair; but this ill-timed accident of Sir Tracy has given us no choice. All the remainder of the company are gone West already; there was no one else we could trust, and I must be quit of the country to-night."

Adelaide lifted her head proudly. "Indeed, you can trust me, sir," she said quietly.

"We do trust you, madam—with our lives."

He drew out his snuff-box, and pressing back the miniature in the lid revealed a cavity, from which he drew a small packet of thin paper, closely covered with minute handwriting.

"Here are the papers—the key to the cipher, the list of our company, the names of those in the West who are prepared to support the Prince when he lands in England, the list of arms and ammunition already purchased, and the details of the plan as already arranged. Now, where will you carry them? Remember, no one must dream you have aught of such importance in your possession."

"Ah! I have a hiding place as secure as your own," she answered gaily. Unclasping a heavy gold bracelet, she pressed a hidden spring beside the clasp and unscrewed one end.

"They will be safe in here," she said, showing the hollow cavity thus revealed. "I wear this always, and none would even suspect it contained aught."

She took the papers, and pushing them inside the bracelet, fastened the spring and clasped it round her wrist. "There they will stay until I hand them to Tracy," she said. "Are you satisfied, sir?"

He nodded. "Yet you must not be too secure, madam. Remember, we have a traitor among us."

"The man who betrayed you!" she cried quickly. "And you have no notion who has done it?"

"Not a trace, madam. Yet I was betrayed sure enough, and but for a timely warning should by now be swinging at Tyburn. I fled London at a moment's notice, and must be out of the country to-night or they may yet light on my track. That one of our company should——"

"No, no! it cannot be a traitor among our friends. Some spy has watched you."

"Whichever it be, it behooves you to be careful," he answered sternly. "Look you, madam, who is this fellow who rode with you last night?"

"Mr. Timothy Curtis!" she laughed softly. "He is but a feather-brain, a troubadour of fair ladies, with no more politics than a baby. Moreover, he is Tracy's friend. You have no cause to fear him."

"And wherefore not, madam? Is not his uncle, Lord Westerby, the stoutest of Hanoverians? What brought him here with you?"

"He fell in with us by accident on the road. But, indeed, he suspects nothing, and is above suspicion."

"Madam, he may be all you say; but 'tis ever wiser to suspect most where least cause appears. He is Sir Tracy's

friend, you say ; but not of our company? Beware of him, madam, beware of him, if you would save those whose lives lie here."

He touched the bracelet on her wrist. She looked up quickly with the first trace of fear in her eyes.

"Ah!" she said, "if the papers should be stolen——"

"There would be hangings, madam," he answered grimly. "Such matters should not be committed to paper ; but I cannot get at Sir Tracy, so needs must. Come, courage, madam. There is small cause for fear ; I would but warn you to be careful. Now, farewell. I must be away before folk are stirring."

"Yes, do not linger. Commend me to his Highness, sir."

She held out her hand. He kissed it lightly, and then laid his fingers once more upon the bracelet. "On your life, madam," he said sternly, "watch! Farewell. God keep you."

He turned away and passed out of the door, leaving her standing in the deep embrasure of the window watching the dawn widen in the eastern sky.

"I wonder," she murmured with a sleepy smile, "I wonder how much I do is for the cause and how much for Tracy?"

She was startled by a vigorous yawn in the room behind her. Turning quickly, she saw Timothy Curtis emerging from behind the high-backed settle, yawning, stretching and rubbing his eyes. Her heart almost stood still with fear. She crouched back on the window-seat and he was half-way across the room apparently before he saw her. Then he stopped with a prodigious start and rubbed his eyes.

"Good Heavens, madam!" he cried with more surprise than politeness ; "you rise betimes after your journey."

For a moment her voice refused to sound, and she trembled so violently she could scarcely stand. Then, lifting her eyes and meeting the look of intense surprise on his face, she forced herself to smile and speak as naturally as possible.

"Lud! Mr. Curtis, how you startled me. Faith, sir, I have not yet bidden farewell to my bed. But—but—waking, I—I missed my—er—my bracelet, and fearing I had dropped it here, I—I came to seek it," she ended with a little half-deprecating laugh.

Timothy bowed gravely. "And your search was successful, I see?"

"Yes, here is the truant. And you, sir, are you stirring early, or late, to rest?"

"I, madam? I have passed a short and unholy night upon the settle yonder. I did but wake two minutes since. I thought," he added slowly, "that I heard voices."

Her eyes met his defiantly. "Indeed, you must have been dreaming. And pray, what said those voices—of your dreams?"

"They said; 'Farewell,' madam."

"And nothing more?"

"Madam," he answered quietly, "even in dreams a gentleman does not hear what is not intended for his ears."

She drew in her breath with a quick sigh of relief.

"Lud! sir," she cried lightly, "you are a very Prince of Dreamers. I vow, your sponsors were greatly amiss not to name you 'Joseph.' For myself, I have dreamed but little to-night, and so to bed till noon."

Hitherto she had stood resolutely between him and the window, but now she could invent no longer cause for delay. He drew aside to let her pass, and reluctantly she left

her post and walked slowly to the door. He held it open for her, bowing gravely as she passed him, but as soon as she had reached the foot of the stairs he closed the door sharply and bounded back to the window, pulling it open and thrusting his head out into the cold morning air.

As he looked out a man on horseback emerged upon the road from behind an outbuilding; he was huddled in a cloak, but Timothy recognised him as their visitor on the previous evening. He glanced toward the inn, and Timothy withdrew his head quickly. The stranger paused a moment, made a gesture as if in response to some greeting from an upper window, and touching with his spurs his horse's flanks, rode away.

Timothy left the window and sat down on the edge of the table, moodily swinging his legs. His mouth was set in a hard line, and there was an unwonted look of anger in his blue eyes.

"I don't ask much of women," he muttered, "so only they be beautiful; but if a woman like Adelaide Wimbourne, married to the finest man in England, can stoop to midnight meetings, with that poor devil of a Tracy tied by the leg in London, why—why—how can a man put his trust in any woman's faith? Romance—pish! It's only moonshine. Give me honest noon-day and the open road."

So saying, he sprang to his feet and striding out of the inn, made his way across the meadows to the river for a morning dip.

When Timothy Curtis had finished his morning swim, drunk his morning chocolate, and perfected his morning toilette, he felt more disposed to take a tolerant view of the world in general and of woman in particular than had been the case at four o'clock in the morning. Having

ascertained that the ladies were not intending to set out upon their journey before noon, he lit his pipe and strolled across the meadows, meditating calmly upon his duty to his uncle and the advisability of giving Romance the go-by, and placing his hand and as much of his heart as remained to him at the disposal of the unknown damsel at Bristol.

"A rare cozener, Dame Diana," he mused, as he strolled through the sunlit meadow; "as treacherous as all her sex. But she pales in the honest sunlight as a man's fancy dies in the light of sense. Dreams go well enough with the moonshine; in the daylight a man must live."

So musing, he topped a rise in the meadow and stood suddenly spellbound, gazing down at the sight before him.

On the bank below him sat Miss Celia Winnington, her white dress gleaming against the pale green of the meadow-grass. She was bareheaded; soft curls blew across her forehead; the sun touched her amber hair into a halo of living gold. Her round arms, dimpled at wrist and elbow, and the slim white hands, pink-tipped like apple-blossoms, flashed in the sun as she moved them rapidly to and fro weaving a garland of wild roses and honeysuckle. The oval of her cheek was smooth and rosy as a child's, her complexion was very fair; but the small, pointed chin and firm lines of the mouth gave a touch of piquancy and character to a face almost too ethereally beautiful.

She was, as it were, Love and Joy and Youth personified. She was the spirit of a man's dream when the wine of the rose-scent is warming his blood. She was as fresh as the wind, as elusive as moonlight, as warm and tender and delicious as a summer day. She was, in fine, Miss Celia Winnington, whose picture every man carried in his heart as a

happy memory, while no woman marvelled or grudged that it should be so.

All this Timothy Curtis dimly felt as he stood above her, watching the slim hands weaving the delicate garland, watching the sunbeams dancing in her hair. And he marvelled that he had noted her looks so little on the previous evening, and thought himself a fool for having deemed her sister more beautiful than she. Then suddenly Celia lifted her heavy lashes and looked up into his eyes, and Timothy ceased then and there to think at all. His meditations concerning a man's duty to his uncle, his opinions anent the advantages of wealth, faded from his mind as though they had never been. The sunshine completed what the moonlight had begun, and Timothy crossed the sacred threshold of the land of Dreams.

Timothy sat at her feet and they talked. The Fates had gifted him with a tongue; there was a savour in his talk, and jest, and a pleasing gallantry. Celia looked at him with approving eyes, and in their light it was no hard task to shine. Perhaps the greatest secret of her charm lay in her subtle power to make a man appear at his best when in her company. For vanity is not woman's monopoly.

Presently she dropped her hands on her lap and looked out across the sunshiny world with a suggestion of wistfulness in her eyes.

"Are you journeying to Bath, Mr. Curtis?" she asked simply. Was it her tone or Timothy's vanity that gave her words a meaning most precious in his ears?

"No, madam," he answered slowly; "I am—er—I was on my way to Bristol."

"To Bristol!" she exclaimed in surprise.

The light died from Timothy's eyes and the sunshine from

his world. Even as she spoke the word, into his land of dreams stepped the spectre of reality, for to him Bristol stood for stern duty, for loveless wisdom, for unromantic reason; in fine, for all the safety, the flatness, the solid advantages of the hard highroad.

Therefore his face fell and his eyes grew hard as he answered, "Faith! even so. To Bristol."

She looked at him curiously. "Your errand is unwelcome to you; is it not so? No?" she asked commiseratingly.

He looked up into her eyes and made a last desperate clutch at vanishing reason.

"Madam," he said sadly, "I am going to be married."

"To be married?" She drew in her breath quickly, and for a moment, for the fraction of a second, a shadow darkened her eyes. Then she turned to him with a bright smile.

"I congratulate you, sir, with all my heart."

"Thank you," said Timothy glumly.

"You are a strange bridegroom, Mr. Curtis," she said, watching him curiously.

"Madam, I have never seen the lady."

"Never seen her?" she cried incredulously.

A feeling of desperation, of defiance, drove him to confession.

"She is rich, madam," he said bluntly.

"Ah-h!" She said no more, but her tone expressed so much that Timothy winced and hardened his heart defiantly.

There was a silence; then she heaved a deep sigh.

"Poor girl!" she said softly. "Poor, poor girl!"

Timothy started. Pity for the lady was unexpected; was, he considered, somewhat wanting in taste.

"Madam?" he stammered in surprise.

"It was surely easier for a woman to die than to marry without love," continued Celia softly.

Timothy grew argumentative. "But is it not possible I may not be so happy as to obtain her regard?" he asked hopefully.

Her lips twitched, but she answered gravely: "If that could be so, I should but pity her the more."

"But if I, too, should learn to love her, madam?"

She looked at him doubtfully. "That might well be. The gods oft bestow more than is deserved. But were I the lady, methinks I should be somewhat suspicious of a love that follows so close on the heels of convenience."

He flushed. "Gad, madam!" he said testily, "a man must live."

"Assuredly. I should have conceived that a man would live—not exist like a parasite upon the welfare of others."

"'Pon my soul, madam!" cried Timothy indignantly, springing to his feet.

She laid her hand on his arm. "Forgive me, Mr. Curtis," she said softly. "I am but a girl and know nothing of what men consider honourable. I thought only of the woman you are about to—to rob. Look you," she continued quickly, "think what is the life of a woman. She has no career. She may not work, she may not fight, she must not stray in unknown paths lest she trip and smirch herself in the mire. All the day she wanders fettered through her world, seeking one goodly pearl, the true love of a man, and when she has found it she barter all she has in exchange. Ah, sir, if, when the bargain be sealed, she find her purchase counterfeit, what more remains to her in life? She cannot make the bargain anew."

Timothy stood a moment gazing down at her in silence,

moved by the unexpected earnestness of her tone. All the virtue in his soul was wakened by her words; all the experience of his life warred against them.

"Madam," he said gently, "are not these dreams?"

"Dreams!" she echoed softly. Then she laughed suddenly, and looked up at him with challenge in her eyes. "Dreams! Maybe. But it needs a brave man to dare to dream nowadays. I had not thought you a coward, Mr. Curtis."

It was a challenge as surely as if she had flung the glove at his feet. A challenge to turn his back on the calm haven of reason and self-interest and sail his craft into the unknown seas of idealism and romance. A challenge! And when had Timothy Curtis been known to refuse such? He saw himself trapped. He looked down a moment into her smiling face; then he flung up his head and broke into a hearty laugh. "Madam, I take up the glove," he said. "Henceforth I will dare to dream. I give you my word that I will never wed where I cannot love, and no woman shall owe her scaith to me."

She rose to her feet and held out her hands to him with a pretty, impulsive gesture.

"The world is so full of cowards," she said.

"Yet you do not fear my resolution will fail?"

"No, I can trust you," she said simply. Then she turned and led the way across the meadow.

At the gate she turned, a troubled look in her eyes.

"I trust I have not been indiscreet, Mr. Curtis," she said simply, "to speak as I did. Adelaide is always warning me that I know nothing of the world. But I forget to hide my thoughts."

He took her hand with a smile. "I think, Mistress Celia,

you need not fear to show them. No man will live his life the worse for a sight of them."

She smiled back at him gratefully and passed on through the gate.

Timothy stood alone in the meadow. He looked round on the sunny landscape with a new light in his eyes.

"A dream may pass like a watch in the night," he muttered softly, "but the remembrance of it will be blessed forever."

When he reached the inn he found the ladies' coach, on which the wheel had been again secured, waiting before the door. Adelaide, already cloaked, stood ready for departure. She greeted him brightly; her face wore no trace of conscious recollection of their previous meeting.

"I may be permitted to escort you on your journey, Lady Wimbourne?" he asked eagerly.

She eyed him quickly and shook her head, McFee's warning fresh in her mind.

"I think not, sir. There be many tongues in the world, and last night's adventure, were it known, would doubtless set them wagging unpleasantly. We will, so please you, continue our way alone."

For a moment his eyes grew hard with suspicion. Was she contemplating further midnight meetings, he wondered? But she smiled at him so innocently he banished the thought.

"We shall see you in Bath anon," she said kindly.

"Mr. Curtis is journeying to Bristol," interposed Celia hurriedly, as she descended the stairs.

Timothy flushed. Adelaide looked from one to the other and laughed mischievously.

"To Bristol? To Lord Westerby? Ah, well, doubtless Bath will see you soon. The town holds many attractions."

With another laugh she took her sister's arm and led her to the coach. Both turned at the door and waved their hands to him. A minute later the coach vanished in a cloud of dust.

Timothy waited two hours after their departure, lying upon his back by a certain sacred spot in the meadow, dreaming of blue eyes and slim white hands pink-tipped like apple blossoms. Then he returned to the inn and called for his horse.

He mounted and turned to the ostler.

"Have you ever been to Bristol, my man?" he asked solemnly.

"Ay!" said the man proudly; my sister's husband lives there. Keeps the sign o' the Blue Cow."

"Did you ever dream there?"

"Dream!" cried the man, stretching his head in amazement. "No, I never dreamed o' nowt to speak on. Nor my sister, neither."

"Exactly," said Timothy with a chuckle. "Bristol, I conceive, is no place for a man to dream in. I will to Bath."

CHAPTER III

“THE TOAST”

THE chimes of Bath rang out a merry peal of welcome as Lady Wimbourne's coach rattled into the city at two o'clock on the following Thursday afternoon. Adelaide was weary with the journey over the jolting roads, and lay back with closed eyes, unmoved by any interest in the busy streets. Celia, on the contrary, sat upright, her face flushed, her eyes gleaming with eagerness. It was her first visit to this far-famed city, which offered to every débutante the Eldorado of her dreams.

As the coach turned into the High Street an overturned chair brought it to a pause. Celia leaned forward eagerly to watch the passing crowds. As she did so three gentlemen stopped promptly and stared after the coach, greatly inconveniencing the passers-by.

“Great Heavens!” breathed Sir Marcus Ormonde devoutly, “who is she?”

“The most beautiful woman in England,” murmured David Beringer with conviction. “Did you mark the whiteness of her hands?”

Sir Charles Rathborne said nothing, thereby doubtless intimating that he thought the more.

At the end of the street the three men took abrupt leave of one another and went their several ways. Some minutes later they encountered one another again inquiring of the Gate Ward the name of this latest visitor to the city. The encounter embarrassed them not a little.

“Egad! Charles, you are marvellously interested of a sudden in the affairs of the city,” said Marcus drily; “have you a mind to rival Nash for the Kingdom?”

Charles Rathborne flushed. “I—I thought they were Tracy’s liveries,” he said indifferently; “it seems Lady Wimbourne has left him in town.”

“It appears she has a—a lady with her; her sister it seems,” said Beringer, idly swinging his cane.

Marcus burst into hearty laughter. “You demmed hypocrites. For my part, when an angel enters the city, I make no secret of seeking out her lodging.”

“Have you ever noted,” said David nonchalantly, “how few pretty women have blue eyes?”

“Miss Winnington’s eyes are not blue,” said Charles quickly, and stopped with an embarrassed air.

“Pardon me,” said Beringer; “they are as blue as Nankin china.”

“They are grey—the colour of distant hills,” said Charles testily.

“For my part,” said Marcus resolutely, “I shall go and see for myself.”

He swung off to his lodging, leaving the other two to disembarass themselves of each other’s company as best they might.

An hour later, being the earliest possible moment that etiquette permitted it, Marcus Ormonde, resplendent in blue brocade, sallied forth from his lodging to wait upon Lady Wimbourne and welcome her to Bath. At the turning into St. James’s Parade he again encountered Charles Rathborne, obviously bent upon the same errand. Marcus eyed his person with distaste and his costume with contumely.

“You are plaguy impatient to learn Tracy’s welfare,” he said, laughing at Rathborne’s embarrassed countenance. “Lady Wimbourne will be monstrously complimented by so ready a visitor.”

“It seems others are readier,” muttered Charles disconsolately, as voices and laughter floated down to them from the upper window.

In the drawing-room they discovered Lord Robert Dacre already in possession, supported by the youthful Sir Peter Pemberton. The latter, supplying by resolution what he lacked in address, had ensconced himself in a chair directly in front of Celia Winnington, and being notably wanting in subjects of conversation, was assuring her for the twentieth time that “it was monstrous pleasant to meet her in Bath.”

Adelaide Wimbourne received her visitors with an amused twinkle in her eyes, and after answering somewhat confused and absent inquiries after her husband’s welfare, hastened to present them to her sister. Celia looked up at the newcomers with a bright blush of welcome and a demure little smile, which conveyed to each the assurance that she was well aware this was the second time they had looked into each other’s eyes.

By the time ill-fated David Beringer (who had undergone troublous times with his cravat) appeared upon the scene, Marcus and Rathborne had firmly established themselves upon a friendly footing with the fair *débutante*. David scowled upon them as he leaned over Peter Pemberton’s barricading chair and strove to make opportunities for meeting Celia’s eyes; he repented the half hour he had wasted in futile struggle before his mirror.

Lord Robert marked the scowl and turned to Adelaide with a reproachful shake of the head.

"I trust this is no goddess of discord you have brought us, Lady Wimbourne," he said softly; "we cannot risk quarrels in our company."

Adelaide looked across at the group around her sister with a wistful smile of a great-hearted woman who recognises that her reign is over, and stands ready to offer loyal homage to her supplanter.

"You need not fear that Celia will throw the apple," she said wisely; "if a beautiful woman wakes discord, 'tis her own doing. It lies in her hands to make love either a strengthening bond of unity or a hateful seed of jealousy and strife."

"Yet she has but one heart to give in return for the many that will be offered."

"What then? No man can be the poorer for having offered his love to one so worthy of it. I am very proud of my sister, Lord Robert."

When Celia Winnington entered the Assembly Rooms that evening for her first ball rumour was already busy with her name. Glasses were levelled at her from all sides. Reigning beauties resignedly confessed to her attractions, and hoary connoisseurs pronounced her charms almost the equal of those of the women of their youth, the memory of whose loveliness distant years had so wondrously enhanced.

Even Mr. Nash, stern arbiter of etiquette though he was, for once relaxed his rigid rule and gave Beauty precedence over Rank, presenting Miss Winnington's hand to the Earl of Cork for the first minuet.

"It should by right be her Grace of Shrewsbury," he said anxiously, when Cork proffered his request.

"Preserve us," murmured the Earl, with a grimace; "her Grace should not overtax her strength, Mr. Nash."

“Her Grace is already set down to whist,” intervened Lord Robert. “For Heaven’s sake, Beau, let Cork lead out Miss Winnington before Peter Pemberton choke himself over a compliment.”

“When the Immortals come among us ’tis only right we honour them above mundane rank,” said the Beau, with the bow no man ever ceased to envy; and the Earl of Cork led out Celia to the dance.

It was no slight ordeal for a woman, that minuet at the Assembly Rooms danced before the silent observance of six hundred critical eyes. She shared, indeed, the publicity with her partner, but few marked the man’s performance; little was expected of him. Many women trembled with nervousness as they danced, tripping and floundering through the figure from sheer terror of the staring eyes and whispering tongues. More than once a *débutante* had fled in tears from the ordeal.

But Celia Winnington, in happy unconsciousness of any cause for fear, danced with all the innocent enjoyment of a music-loving soul. Her graceful head dipped and rose over her billowing skirts like a sea-gull swooping to the waves; the lights flashed on her white hands and mellowed in the delicious curves of her blue-veined arms; her young figure swayed to the music with all the charm of unconscious grace. And as she danced she smiled, that sweet elusive smile that only touched her lips, but deepened in her eyes, telling so many mysteries, speaking such happy hopes.

It had long been the complaint of many that the ladies of Bath wore too grave an air at their entertainments, treating the dance rather as a solemn ceremony than as a graceful pleasure, and robbed the minuet of all the witchery, all the coquettish inspiration of its interpretation. These

critics were enraptured by Celia's performance, by the sweet suggestion of surrender in her curtseys, by the subtle hint of challenge that lurked in the laughter in her eyes. Entranced, they watched her, and when at length the music ceased and her partner led her to a seat, to Nash's shocked amazement, a round of applause broke the well-bred silence.

Celia looked up in surprise; then realising, at last, that she was the object of this enthusiastic admiration, she smiled round upon the company with the happiest expression of delight in the pleasure she had given them.

There was no trace of triumphant vanity in her frank glance, no touch of pride in her heart; she knew she was beautiful, and, like the flowers, she rejoiced in the fact and was innocently glad that her beauty should add to the loveliness of a world she found so kindly.

Her happy, childlike little smile of acknowledgment put the final touch to her triumph, for it awakened in the heart of every man that chivalrous sense of protection toward woman's innocence which no fair looks alone, however rare, can ever touch; for it lies deeper even than man's love of woman's beauty.

The beautiful Mrs. Greenways, who had hitherto reigned supreme, laid her hand on Adelaide's arm, and there were tears in her eyes as she whispered softly:

"You've brought us a new Queen of Bath, my dear, and an addition to their number is seldom welcome. But she wears her crown so sweetly there's not a woman in the kingdom could find it in her heart to grudge her homage."

Adelaide carried her sister away at an early hour from the Rooms. It was barely nine o'clock when they reached St. James's Parade. They sat down together in

the wide window embrasure, discussing the events of the evening.

“It was amazingly enjoyable, Laidie,” said Celia, looking down into the quiet twilight street with smiling eyes; “but it would seem all men are monstrously alike in this place.”

Adelaide laughed softly. “Tut, child, you might be as staled as Delia Leslie to find all men alike on your first evening. You should by rights have lost your heart a dozen times already.”

Celia gave a sudden start. Past the window rode a man, travel-stained, on a jaded mare. He whistled softly as he rode, and turning his head from side to side, scanned the windows with half-expectant looks. Suddenly his eyes encountered Celia’s. He paused a moment, arrested. His whole face lighted up with the quick joy of a man who has at last realised his dreams. Then he swept off his hat and bowed low to the saddle, and straightening his shoulders, like one who flings off a load of indecision, he rode on down the street and out of sight.

Celia drew back into the room and looked at Adelaide with a shy glance and blushing cheeks.

“It was Mr. Curtis, Laidie; I had thought he journeyed to Bristol.”

Adelaide looked at her sister whimsically and broke into a soft laugh.

“Do you indeed find all men alike, Celie? Faith! what a dull world this must be for you. Be off to bed, child, and dream of the one man who stands alone.”

Timothy Curtis rode on, blithe of heart, to seek lodgings near the east gate in the house of a daughter of his old nurse. It was an unfashionable quarter, but the rooms were comfortable, the board cheap and the welcome warm. He

settled his belongings, changed his coat, and sallied forth in search of friends and supper.

He turned first to St. James's Parade, but the Wimbourne house was dark and silent, so he bent his steps to the Bear Inn, where he learned the address of Marcus Ormonde's lodging in John Street and strode thither to make his advent known.

Sounds of revelry greeted him as he approached the house; it was evident that a supper party was in progress. He heard Oliver Shirley's voice raised in song, struggling manfully against the distracting accompaniment of Beringer's flageolet. With a laugh, Timothy brought his rich baritone to Oliver's succour, and joined in the verse as he climbed the stairs.

Before he reached the topmost step a door was flung wide and Marcus Ormonde rushed out with a hearty greeting.

"Tim Curtis, by all that's marvellous!" he cried, dragging him into the room; "what good fortune brings you to Bath, you demmed slippery blade."

"Weathered the storm, eh, Tim?" cried Charles Rathborne, greeting him gladly.

"Did the heiress prove obdurate, eh?" asked Oliver.

"Egad, no. He wheedled the uncle, I'll go surety," laughed Marcus. "Never lived so honey-tongued a vagabond as Tim. Come, fall to and eat. Have you only just arrived?"

Timothy sat down to supper and the others grouped round him, smoking and asking the latest from town.

"Out with your tale, Tim," urged Lord Robert presently. "What brings you to Bath?"

"I had a fancy to visit the city," answered Timothy vaguely.

Beringer shook his head solemnly. “Ah! all the world will be drawn here presently. There’s a wonder come to Bath, Tim.”

“A wonder? What like? A dancing pig or a muckle-mouthed woman?”

“Muckle-mouthed!” gasped Beringer indignantly. “Why, man, it’s a new beauty, Miss Celia Winnington.”

Timothy looked up quickly. “Ah! you’ve seen her, have you?” he asked.

“Seen her? Gad! yes, we’ve all seen her,” said Marcus whimsically; “that is why we are here now. Nothing short of the mellowing influence of my uncle’s old wine would have kept us from flying at each other’s throats to-night. Seen her! What ails the man? She’s been in Bath nine hours and he asks if we’ve seen her!”

Beringer heaved a deep sigh. “Her hair is like a wandering sunbeam on a rippling lake,” he murmured rapturously.

“Her hands are like the silver cloud in which the moon veils herself,” said Lord Robert, not to be outdone in simile.

“Her voice is the music of the forest in spring,” suggested Oliver Shirley, whose stout body clothed a poetic soul.

“And her eyes,” intervened Rathborne—“gad, Tim, her eyes are like the ocean; no man can speak clearly of their colour. When she looks at you——”

“When she looks at you,” Peter Pemberton blurted out suddenly, “you remember all you’ve done in a scurvy, idle life, and plague take me, but you’re demmed sorry!”

Timothy put his hand kindly on the boy’s shoulder.

“Monstrously wholesome for all of us, eh, Peter?”

“Have you done supper, Tim?” cried Marcus impatiently. “Give us a song.”

“A song! To-night! Not I. I’ve ridden twenty miles since noon.”

“Oh! none of your vanity, Tim,” urged Marcus; “your voice will pass even if it be a trifle rusty. Fill up his glass, Charles, and warm his blood.”

Timothy rose, glass in hand, and crossing to the wide window-seat, looked out into the night. The round moon sailed high above the house-tops in a clear, azure sky. Timothy smiled up at her thoughtfully.

“Come, Tim, a song,” urged Oliver Shirley. The others joined in the demand. Tim turned and faced them with a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

“I’ll give you a toast first,” he cried, raising his glass.

“A toast!” cried Lord Robert, reaching for the decanter. “Who is she? Out with it, Tim.”

Timothy stood with one foot on the window-seat, his glass uplifted toward the sky.

“The moon,” he began slowly, “is rightly dubbed Queen of the Heavens, for when she shines all the stars grow pale and wan. Whoso looks too long on her glories loses his wits, yet no man, for any such dread, would willingly forego sight of her beauty. Gentlemen, I give you——”

But here Marcus Ormonde intervened.

“Timothy,” he cried reproachfully, “I’ve not a word to say against Dame Diana; she’s plaguy useful on a dark night. But, demme, if I’ll have my uncle’s old port poured out to such a cold-blooded queen. Taste it, man! taste it! You’ll understand then what’s fitting.”

Timothy held up his hand for silence.

“Gentlemen,” he continued imperturbably, “I give you,

not Diana, Moon of the Heavens, but the Moon of Bath."

For an instant they were silent, not taking his meaning, then, with a shout of delight, Marcus sprang to his feet.

"Demme, Tim, I knew your tongue would hit the mark," he cried enthusiastically. "Come, fill your glasses and drink her health with royal honours. Miss Celia Winnington, the Moon of Bath!"

They rose to their feet with brimming glasses held high above the shining candles, the light bejewelling the ruby wine. There was a shout of agreement, a moment's silence, and then the crash and tinkle of a hundred atoms of shimmering glass.

CHAPTER IV

“ON GUARD”

A MONOTONOUS splash of a fountain, a rustle of silk, and a never-ceasing babble of talk; a sea of rainbow-coloured silks, a forest of nodding curls, a bevy of fair women's faces; add music, sunshine, and laughter and you have a picture of the Pump Room at Bath on a bright July morning in the year of Grace 1745.

The company in the room was mostly feminine at this hour. Here and there a bass voice deepened the treble of talk, here and there a smooth head broke the tossing surface of elaborate curls. Mr. Nash was there, over seventy, but still alert, quick-eyed, passing from group to group with the same sharp word for ill-manners or impertinence, the same kindly smile for every shy *débutante* hiding behind her mother's skirts. Elderly men, more concerned with the cure than with gallantries, hobbled painfully about the room. Half a dozen wits of that genius that requires woman's appreciation whispered to as many groups of ladies with the complacent knowledge that their words would win the immortality of Bath. As many lovers hung at the skirts of their mistresses.

But for the most part the men took their glass in the gardens, strolling to and fro on the sunlit terrace or lounging near the gate to watch the arrival of the more celebrated beauties of the town.

The group round the gate was unwontedly large that morning, for Lady Wimbourne unaccountably stayed her

coming, and with Lady Wimbourne would come the new toast of Bath, Miss Celia Winnington. Queenship in that company was an uncertain tenure; few held it more than a week, the love of variety extending even into this domain, but the Queen of Bath had, it must be confessed, a royal reign while it lasted, for none withheld their homage, and hearts were flung at her feet as freely as nose-gays.

Celia Winnington had a knack of accepting either with the same quiet smile and the same gracious thanks, and of holding the gifts so tenderly, and withal so innocently, that no man grudged that she gave him naught in return. Perchance it was to this she owed the remarkable fact that, though it was now full ten days since she had made her first appearance in the city, her popularity showed no sign of diminishing.

The group round the gate moved restlessly to and fro, staring eagerly up the street toward the southern end of the town, and watching each approaching chair with keen impatience till the colour of the liveries might be discerned. Occasionally one or two broke away and strolled up to the terrace to exchange greetings with the various ladies who ventured out into the sun. But few stayed long away from the post of vantage at the entrance to the gardens.

Presently a man emerged from the door of the Pump Room and stood looking down upon the attendant group with a whimsical smile on his lips. He was tall, fair and exquisitely dressed with the perfection of one who has bestowed infinite thought upon the subject. His wide grey eyes wore a look of half-bored amusement, and his lips curled in an habitual good-tempered sneer. His expression was that of one who deems the world no better than it should be, and finds no heart to blame it for its sins. It was a

face to attract, a face to be loved, but too reckless, too cynical to be trusted by man or woman.

He strolled slowly down toward the gate, and seating himself on a bench, put up his quizzing glass and surveyed the attendant gallants solemnly, shaking his head gravely over their plight.

"'Pon my soul," he began sadly, "'pon my soul, but it goes to my heart to see you. Here are some twenty stout hearts quavering at the advent of one chit of a girl; twenty honest souls sighing for one smile. And all in vain! For I tell you plainly, what fraction of a heart she possesses was bestowed upon me full sixteen years ago. You waste your pains, gentlemen."

The group of men wheeled round and faced her brother in impotent embarrassment. No man avowedly awaited for Miss Celia Winnington, though each guessed the reason of the others' impatience; to hear the fact that they had waited an hour for the chance of a passing smile thus baldly stated in words upset their self-esteem.

"You go home, Rory Winnington," said David Beringer gloomily. "It's monstrous unfriendly of you to—to—to quiz your friends. Monstrous ungentlemanly."

Rory opened his eyes in well-feigned amazement.

"Unfriendly! Why, man, aren't I talking on the very subject that should by rights interest you most amazingly? Aren't I warning you from wasting your time? Look at Tim Curtis, there. He's so far gone in love he doesn't know a knave from a deuce, but he'll lose nothing for want of asking. Didn't he order a certain lady to come in out of the damp yesterday, and didn't she dance twice with him afterward as token of forgiveness?"

Tim flushed at the fire of jealous glances directed toward

him. He lifted his cane and lunged playfully at his tormentor.

“Look to yourself, Rory,” he said good-humouredly; “I warrant there’s a weak spot somewhere if a man could but get under your guard. Some day I’ll find the thrust that will touch you.”

“Not you, Tim,” said Rory, eyeing him lazily; “not you. You’re blinded by a pair of white hands. A novice could disarm you.”

A stir by the gate announced the approach of the long-expected chairs.

“Here they come!” cried Rory, springing to his feet with mock eagerness. “The morning star approacheth. Lud! sirs, how my heart beats. Davie, stand straight, for Heaven’s sake! Gad! Charlie, look at your cravat. Peter, Peter, sure you’ll never appear before a lady in that coat! Have you seen yourself, boy?”

The men thus addressed vainly endeavoured not to look conscious as the foremost of the two chairs, carefully closed, was deposited at the gate. There was a rush to open the door. Beringer and Rathborne were the foremost, but Timothy Curtis, placing a firm hand on each man’s shoulder, swung them aside and took the centre place. With a sweep of his hat, he opened the door, and then fell back into the arms of Marcus Ormonde, while a roar of laughter rose from the group behind him and rippled back over the gardens up to the sunlit terrace beyond. For instead of the fair face and golden curls of Miss Celia Winington, the opening of the chair revealed a slight, dark man with twinkling brown eyes and delicately cut features, who sat smiling and bowing at the company with an absurd imitation of a simper.

“Tracy Wimbourne, by all that’s holy!” gasped Timothy in amazement. “Why, man, when did you come down from town?”

“Lud, sirs, what a gratifying reception!” cried Tracy, fluttering and becking like a coquettish girl and making eyes at all the assembled gallants. “I vow, ’tis overwhelming. Here, Tim, help me out, there’s a good fellow; this pestilent leg of mine is not yet healed.”

Timothy and Lord Robert helped him out and handed him his stick, while the other men hurried to the second chair and tried to conceal their disappointment when Lady Wimbourne emerged.

She looked round on their crestfallen faces and laughed.

“You must seek the rose elsewhere this morning, gentlemen,” she said gaily. “She is breakfasting with my Lady Grey at Simpson’s. Rory, you dear vagabond, why are you not with her? Surely you were bidden?”

“Not I, Laidie; her ladyship’s too bedad honest for me.” He crossed to his sister and took her hand with a transient gleam of tenderness in his mocking eyes. “So Tracy has come at last, eh? When did he arrive?”

“This morning only, as we were setting out. Oh, Rory, ’tis Heaven to have him back again.”

Timothy, who was walking beside Tracy, heard the exclamation and looked back quickly. If ever woman’s face expressed devotion, it was surely written upon Adelaide’s as her eyes rested on her husband. Tim thought of the meeting at the inn and marvelled.

They passed slowly up the garden, exchanging many greetings on their way. It was evident Tracy was a welcome acquisition to their company. The party came to halt at a seat beside the door of the Pump Room, and the men

gathered round the newcomer with a storm of questions and chaff.

Timothy seated himself on the back of the bench behind his friend, Lord Robert Dacre lounged on the other side of Tracy, leaning over his shoulder. The other men were grouped in front of the newcomer. Adelaide met her husband's eyes. She turned to Tim.

“Will you hand me into the Pump Room, Mr. Curtis, for my glass? Rory, will you come?”

She departed with her escort. Tracy threw a quick glance behind him. He picked up his wife's fan which lay beside him.

“My wife has left her fan. Peter”—turning to Sir Peter, who had moved to Tim's vacant place behind him—“will you take it to her?”

When Sir Peter had departed on his errand, Tracy leaned back, took his snuff-box, and, holding it up near his face, slowly took a pinch.

“Gad! how strong those roses smell!” he drawled. “Are they the same blooms Allen brought from France last year?”

Lord Robert lowered his eyes for a second; inside the lid of the snuff-box, facing him, was a slip of paper bearing the words: “The Christopher Inn. To-morrow. At nine.”

Tracy shut his box with a snap. “Touching France,” he continued, “rumour has it that ‘the Boy,’ as Geordie dubs the Stuart, is growing restive, and Pelham is buying eyes and ears by the bushel.”

Presently Lord Robert drifted away and joined Mr. Secombe, who was leaving the gardens.

“The Christopher Inn—to-morrow—at nine,” he said,

as they strolled through the gate. They parted at Abbey Green with a nod.

The Abbey clock chimed ten. The company began to disperse; the men to read the news-sheets at the coffee houses; the ladies, for the most part, to the mercers' shops.

Adelaide came out of the Pump Room with Tim still in attendance. She paused at the door and turned to him with a mischievous smile.

"Mr. Curtis, why do you not ride on Claverton Down this morning?" she asked. "'Tis a monstrously favoured spot for riding parties—so Celia assures me."

Timothy met her smile with a look of intelligence.

"Madam, if you advise it, I will go there presently," he answered joyously.

She dismissed him with a smile, and Timothy departed with a grateful heart. Lady Wimbourne's conduct toward him puzzled him. She seemed at times to welcome and encourage his attention to her sister, but anon he would find her watching him suspiciously and as though she feared him.

Adelaide joined Tracy. He rose and limped through the gardens to his chair. They were borne to their house in St. James's Parade.

Directly the door closed upon the servants who had helped him up the stairs, Adelaide turned eagerly to her husband. He sank into a chair, and met her questioning look with a reassuring smile.

"All's well, Laidie. I meet them to-morrow. Now, child, your news. You have the papers safe?"

She slipped to her knees beside him, and laid her head fondly against his arm.

“Tracy, ’tis the first moment alone since you came,” she said reproachfully, “and you talk of the papers.”

He laughed tenderly, and, stooping, kissed her hair.

“Am I to blame for that, sweetheart? Should not the King come even before you?”

“I should not love you near so dearly did he not,” she said, laughing at her own inconsistency. “But tell me, Tracy, you—you—you—*do* love me?”

“So dearly, that, had it been possible otherwise, I would not have these white hands soiled with intrigue even for the King’s sake.”

“Ah! but, Tracy, I am grown a rare intriguante,” she cried eagerly; “did you mark how I rid you of Mr. Curtis? He had shadowed us the whole day else. He has talked to me of little else but your coming these ten days past.”

Tracy’s eyes softened. “Tim’s a rare blade,” he said affectionately. “Where have you sent him, Laidie?”

“On a wild goose chase on Claverton Down,” she laughed. “Tracy, why is he not one of us?”

He hesitated. “I have tested him, but Tim is an immovable fellow,” he said slowly. “And he has—er—principles.”

“Hanoverian?”

“All his family have always stood strong for the Whigs. But I have hopes he may think with us in time.”

“You like him, Tracy?”

“He’s the gallantest heart, the loyalest friend on earth, Laidie. Why do you ask?”

“I have thought these last ten days that Celia holds your opinion of him.”

“Does she, indeed! And he——?”

“Oh! Celia is the reigning toast. All the world is in

love with the child. I could find it in my heart to be jealous, were it not that I have no room in my heart for aught but you."

"And the King?" he asked half mockingly.

"No," she said quickly. "My brains for the King, if you will, but my heart all for you."

He took her in his arms. "Indeed, sweetheart, I am so disloyal that I would not have it otherwise."

For a minute they sat in silence. Then he disengaged himself gently from her embrace and raised his head.

"And now, child, give me the papers," he said briskly.

She checked a little sigh, smiling at her own jealousy.

"Yes, it is better you should have them at once, before Celia returns," she said, rising and unclasping her bracelet. "Here they have lain undisturbed these ten days. Are you not proud of me for carrying them so safely?"

As she spoke she touched the spring and unscrewed the lid. There was a moment's dead silence; the bracelet fell with a crash to the ground, and she raised to him a face white with terror.

"Tracy," she cried hoarsely; "they are gone! Gone!"

"Gone! Impossible!"

"Yes—yes—" she muttered dully. "They are not here! I have lost them!"

She swayed, and held out her hands to him suddenly with a gesture of utter helplessness. Her face was quivering with fright.

"Tracy, help me, help me!" she cried despairingly. "What can I do?"

He took her hands in his and putting his arm round her helped her to a chair. She sank into it and covered her face with her hands.

He picked up the bracelet and examined it carefully. It was empty. He laid it quietly on the table and stood a moment, his brows drawn together with a deep frown of anxiety. Then he crossed to her side.

“Listen to me, sweetheart,” he said quietly. “The papers have been stolen. You are not to blame, but you must be brave and help me to find the thief. Now when did you put them in the bracelet?”

He waited patiently till she choked back her sobs to answer:

“The moment Captain McFee gave them to me. I have not opened it since.”

“And you have worn it always?”

“At first, always. But these last few days I took it off o’ nights and put it under my pillow.”

“Ah! Why did you do that?”

“It—it marked my wrist.”

He looked down at her with a little despairing smile of wonderment, but made no comment. Then he continued his questioning quietly.

“Did any person know of the papers?”

“No one. I never spoke of them to a soul.”

He thought deeply and bit his lip in bewilderment.

“Now, sweetheart, think. Some one has taken them, ’tis clear. Who has been with you? Did any one know that you met McFee?”

“No. I told no— Ah!——”

She drew in her breath with a sudden gasp of enlightenment and clasped her hands.

“Tracy——”

“Ah! you suspect some one?”

She threw back her head and faced him with shining eyes.

"Suspect!" she cried. "No, I know, I know. Tracy, the thief, the spy, the traitor, is Mr. Curtis!"

He started back as though she had struck him and put up his hand.

"Adelaide," he said sharply, "think what you are saying. Tim Curtis? Impossible. My life on his honour."

She rose quickly to her feet and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Listen, Tracy. Mr. Curtis followed us from London and came to us on the road at the very hour Captain McFee should have joined me. He took us to the inn where Captain McFee lodged. He slept behind the settle and came out a moment after McFee left me, not knowing I was still in the room. He swore he had heard nothing, but—He asked leave to escort us here and has been with us morning, noon and night since we arrived. And, Tracy—Captain McFee told me we had a spy among us, and warned me to beware of Mr. Curtis."

Tracy turned from her. "I'll not believe it," he muttered; "no, I'll not believe it." Then slowly, "You say McFee warned you against him?"

"Yes, dear; he bade me watch him well."

"Have you seen anything?"

"I saw him twice talking with Martha, my maid, in the hall; but she told me it concerned some flowers for Celia, so I thought no more of it. Martha has been much sought after these days."

"We must charge her with the matter. Where is she?"

"I don't know. She left me two days since without explanation. I had thought her untrustworthy before."

He frowned. “I’ll have search made. Is that all you can tell?”

“There is nothing else, save——”

“What?”

“Tracy! I had not thought of it before, but—he lodges in Boat-stall Lane.”

He looked up quickly. “At which end?”

She nodded. “Yes, by the eastern gate.” She gave a little scornful laugh. “A strange lodging, is it not, for a man of fashion?”

He rose and limped restlessly up and down the room.

“Tim Curtis,” he muttered. “Tim! Yet—yet who else? And he was, I know, deucedly hard pressed for money.” He sighed and leaned wearily against the window, looking out with haggard eyes over the sunlit street. “Laidie,” he said softly, “’pon my soul, I had rather it had been myself.”

“Tracy, Tracy, you must do something,” she cried impatiently. “Think, if he has the papers! The danger is horrible. Do you think he has already betrayed you?”

He roused himself. “Not yet, or I were no longer at liberty. No, he is waiting till he holds all the threads. Doubtless he did not expect me from town so soon. But now there is no time to lose.”

“He must be—silenced. You must tell the company.”

He stood a moment in silence, staring thoughtfully at the floor. “No,” he said slowly; “Tim is—was my friend. No man ever had a better. He may be—what you think, but I’ll save his honour. Not a word to the others of this, Laidie. I will see him alone, he will listen to me. He shall give me the papers and start the world again as an honest man.”

Her eyes flashed angrily. "Why should you do this? The world should know him for what he is—a Hanoverian spy."

"Hush, Laidie," he answered softly; "you don't understand — how should you — how gold can tempt a man."

The sound of voices and laughter rose from the street below. Celia Winnington and Lady de Putren were approaching the house, escorted by a number of gentlemen. Lord Robert Dacre and Charles Rathborne had obtained and resolutely held posts of vantage by Celia's side. David Beringer sadly consoled himself with her bouquet. Roger Lee and Marcus Ormonde, though forced to form flanking parties, succeeded in monopolising the conversation with their divinity, while the youthful Peter Pemberton and Oliver Shirley, who was stout and scant of breath, were reluctantly driven to escort Lady de Putren, and could only content themselves with a back view of the object of their devotion.

Last of all came Rory Winnington, chaffing Oliver in an undertone and murmuring sadly at intervals:

"Seldom have I been so amazingly neglected. I vow 'tis plaguy unmannerly of you, gentlemen, to leave me to walk alone. Lud! how can you be so ill-conditioned?"

Celia dismissed her escort at the door, and leaving them to Rory's tender mercies entered the house alone.

Adelaide drew back from the window and turned quickly to her husband.

"Tracy, must we not warn Celia?"

He hesitated. "No," he said slowly; "she believes in mankind; let her keep that faith. I will see that—Curtis—leaves her alone."

“Poor little Celie!” she said softly.

“She has only known him ten days,” said Tracy doubtfully.

“Ten days! Ay, but a woman may live a lifetime in ten short days.”

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF THE COIFFEUSE

TIMOTHY CURTIS rode over Claverton Down for four mortal hours on that sultry July day, till his mare was weary, his coat dusty and his temper soured beyond easy recovery.

Slowly he rode at first, hopefully, waiting with patience the appearance of his divinity, dreaming of her smile. After a while his patience waned, and those who crossed Claverton that day brought strange tales of a vision of a desperate man galloping his weary mare wildly from end to end of the Down in pursuit of distant equestrians, and muttering incoherent imprecations anent all human beings of the feminine gender.

At four o'clock Timothy gave up the search. He rode sulkily back to Bath, dined in gloomy solitude at Simpson's and strode back to his rooms in mind betwixt dread of disaster to Celia and an indignation against Adelaide, which prevented his hurrying to her house to reassure himself.

But the sight of a well-known figure awaiting him in his rooms drove the frown from his face. He sprang forward eagerly to greet his visitor.

"Tracy, you blade! Why, this is friendly, to seek me out the very day of your arrival. I swear Lady Wimbourne will deign to be jealous."

Tracy leaned back in his chair and played nervously with his snuff-box.

"Give me ten minutes, Tim," he said brusquely; "I want to talk to you."

Tim's face fell. He looked at Tracy in amazement.

"Ten minutes? Why, what ails you, man? A plague on your ten minutes. We'll make a night of it."

Tracy shook his head. "My wife is calling for me," presently. "We are bidden to a ball at my Lord Cornwallis's house on the Bristol Road."

"Egad! so am I. I had forgotten. Is your—is Miss Winnington driving with you? Let me change my coat and I'll ride with you."

Tracy silenced him with a gesture.

"I must speak to you now," he said abruptly.

Tim stopped half way to the door and stared at him curiously. Then he tossed his hat and whip on to the table, and dragging up a chair sat on it astride with his arms crossed on the back.

"Well, what's the matter?" he asked cheerily. "Debts, duns, or duelling? I'm all attention."

Tracy opened and shut his snuff-box nervously, and fixed his eyes on the medallion in the lid.

"Tim, I—I sounded you last April about your opinions concerning—er—the House of Stuart."

Timothy set his jaw obstinately.

"You did, Tracy, and I told you the truth. I'd liefer see Noll back in Parliament House again than yon demmed Prince Lackland pluming it at Whitehall. We've a steady government now in the country and civil war is an unholy terror. Leave Jamie's son to play tennis at St. Germain's, and give Geordie a sporting chance to show what he can do for us."

Tracy flushed. "You don't mask your opinions," he said shortly.

Timothy eyed him a moment doubtfully, then held out his hand. "Egad! Tracy, you and I can sure talk politics without any 'cut and thrust.' I am ready to hear what you have to say and to think it over. And for Heaven's sake, man, if you must conspire and talk treason, let it be here, and not in company with fiers like Roger Lee or that rattled Rory Winnington. You can trust me."

Tracy lifted his eyes and fixed them earnestly on his face. "Can I?" he asked slowly.

Tim flushed. "I don't understand you," he said stiffly.

Tracy lowered his glance. "Tim, when you found my wife in the Inn parlour at three o'clock in the morning, how much did you hear?"

"Wh—what?" stammered Tim, staring at him open-mouthed.

"How much did you hear?"

"Nothing," said Tim manfully, "not a word."

Tim was a poor liar; his face betrayed him.

"You can tell me the truth," said Tracy impatiently, "I can guess it."

Tim flushed. "I heard nothing," he reiterated. "It's—it's demmed ungentlemanly of you, Tracy, to expect me to answer your questions. Lady Wimbourne will——"

Tracy stopped him. "Leave my wife out of the matter," he said sharply, "I know her story. The question is, what did you hear?"

"Nothing."

"You won't answer my question?"

"No, I will not."

Tracy hesitated. "A pressing need of money drives many

a poor beggar into an ugly corner," he said slowly. "I'd never be hard on a man for—for one slip."

"I'm plagued if I can make out what you are talking about, Tracy," said Tim peevishly. "Out with it. What hare are you hunting?"

Tracy leaned forward in his chair and eyed him thoughtfully.

"Tim, if a man told you that your best friend was a common traitor, one who spied upon his friends to betray them to the Government; who stole papers from women and bartered them for blood money—if this were proved to you, what would you do?"

Tim looked up at him lazily. "It is conceivable that a man who brought such a charge against a friend of mine might not live long enough to prove it," he said significantly.

Tracy winced. "But if it were proved? What would you do?"

"Kill the traitor," said Tim carelessly.

Tracy rose to his feet with an effort and held out his hand. "Ah! I've more mercy for my friends. Tim, give me back the papers you stole from Adelaide, leave Bath to-night, and the world shall still hold you an honest man."

Timothy dropped his hands to his knees, stared for a moment wide-eyed at the white face and shaking hand of his visitor, then suddenly he threw back his head and broke into a joyous shout of laughter.

"Great Heavens, man!" he cried, "you're demmed drunk."

Tracy sat back into his chair and stared at him doubtfully. Was this innocence, or a magnificent effrontery? He drew a bow at a venture.

"Curtis," he asked slowly, "how much did Pelham offer you to spy upon the friends of the House of Stuart?"

His shot told with extraordinary effect. The laughter died out of Tim's face. He sprang to his feet with an oath of astonishment.

"How the devil did you hear of that?" he gasped.

"You don't deny it?" cried Tracy.

"Deny it? No, why should I?"

For an instant Tracy lost his habitual self-control, his face blazed with passion.

"You hound!" he cried, "you traitor! Give me back those papers, or, by Heaven! I'll proclaim you to the world for what you are, a contemptible——"

He stopped suddenly. Timothy had crossed to his side and stood over him, his face twitching, a peculiar light in his eyes.

"Tracy," he said very quietly, "you are mad. I'll not quarrel with you—I—demme, I can't quarrel with you. But there are things no man shall call me to my face. Plague take you——" he broke out suddenly, with a laugh of exasperation, "what's in the affair to make such a pother? I've done you no harm."

"No harm?" gasped Tracy furiously.

"No, but I'll be plaguy near doing it if — if Heaven doesn't take pity on your madness and strike you dumb," muttered Tim savagely. "You crazy fool, do you dream——"

He stopped abruptly, turned on his heel and striding into the inner room, banged the door behind him to put an effective end to the interview.

Tracy looked after him gloomily. "He has had his

chance," he muttered; "we fight now with the buttons off the foils, and for his life or mine."

With a quick sigh he limped across the room and slowly descended the stairs to the street.

Meanwhile Timothy, in no very pleasant mood, had barely arrayed his person for the evening's entertainment at Lord Cornwallis's house, when the sound of voices in the outer room announced the presence of visitors, and his servant Simon, returning, informed him with awestruck voice that Mr. John Cogswell, the mayor, waited upon him and begged the honour of an interview.

Bidding Simon fetch a horse from the neighbouring Mews, Timothy completed his toilet and strolled in a leisurely manner into the outer room to learn the meaning of this visit.

The mayor was accompanied by two men: one stout and placid, with an air of a prosperous tradesman; the second a small dapper little man whose sharp glances and quick movements betokened him wide-awake to the ways of the world in which he lived. When Timothy entered the room he found all three men crowding in the little side window, their heads close together, peering down into the alley below with such intentness that he crossed behind them and touched the nearest man on the shoulder with his cane before he could gain their attention.

They wheeled round with a look of embarrassment and bowed respectfully.

"Good-evening, Mr. Mayor," he said, laughing at their surprise, "it would seem you find my window plaguy interesting. What should there be in bricks and mortar to take your fancy?"

The mayor flushed and fidgeted. "It has come to my no-

tice, sir, that there are certain tradespeople here—very worthy citizens, Mr. Curtis—who have as yet received no payment for the goods delivered at your rooms.”

“Faith, Mr. Mayor,” laughed Timothy, “Bath is not unique in that respect. Such worthies are by no means rare. What then?”

“They—they have expressed a wish for some guarantee that they will be paid ere the month is out.”

Timothy stared at him haughtily. “I would have you know, Mr. Mayor,” he said sharply, “that I am not in the habit of giving any such guarantee other than my name. And I consider the demand monstrous impertinent.”

The mayor hesitated, but Mr. Simpson, the stout and placid proprietor of the coffee-house of that name, took up the thread.

“Your pardon, Mr. Curtis,” he said, “but you have commanded three public breakfasts, four supper parties and two tea parties in addition to all your private meals at my rooms, and I have as yet received not a sou on account. Mrs. Proud, the florist, has supplied bouquets daily, and there are similar complaints from vintners, mercers and the master at the East Mews yonder. Not one has received as yet any payment.”

“Well! well!” cried Tim testily; “they will be paid in due time. Why, plague take you, I’ve scarce been in the place ten days; is it the custom of your tradespeople here to dun a gentleman for a few paltry crowns before he has so much as unpacked his mails? Demme! such a custom is like to make your town mighty unpopular.”

Here the mayor again stepped forward.

“It is not the custom, Mr. Curtis, unless the gentleman have a—a reputation. It is known that your credit in Lon-

don is exhausted, and our worthy citizens would not risk too much."

Timothy shrugged his shoulders and deliberately helped himself to snuff. "Even so, Mr. Mayor," he said shortly, "I should have deemed it less impertinent had these worthies lodged their complaints themselves. Is it customary here for the City Fathers to busy themselves with a gentleman's embarrassments?"

"The truth is, sir—" began Cogswell, but Mr. Josiah Smith, of London, intervened impatiently.

"Mr. Cogswell, you are a fool, sir. Why don't you speak out plain and let Mr. Curtis know where we stand? The truth, is, sir," he continued briskly, turning to Timothy, "I've been sent here to keep my eye upon a certain house, which is suspected of harbouring lawbreakers, of cloaking their treasonable practices. Information has reached us in London that matters are not as they should be here. We have no names yet, and the affair must be kept quiet till we know our ground, but we are sure of the house, and if we watch it we have hopes we may catch the rats in the trap."

"Well, what then? What has this to do with me?"

"It is difficult for us to watch the house, Mr. Curtis, without exciting suspicion and scaring the quarry. It is for this reason that we have come to seek your help in the affair."

"My help!" cried Timothy indignantly. "Why the deuce should I help you with your dirty work?"

"In consideration of such help, Mr. Curtis," intervened Simpson heavily, "the mayor and I would ourselves be guarantors for you to the tradespeople of Bath."

"Fool! fool!" muttered Josiah Smith under his breath.

“The matter stands this way, Mr. Curtis,” he continued hurriedly, holding up his hand to stay an indignant outburst from Timothy. “The only place from which this house can be conveniently overlooked is yonder window. I was myself in favour of inducing you to change your lodging and taking these rooms myself, but the mayor here opposed it.”

The mayor looked nervously at Josiah. “I—I understand that the woman who keeps this house was a servant of Mr. Curtis’s family. She—it seems probable she would have refused to let her rooms to Mr. Smith without Mr. Curtis’s consent. If you would undertake, Mr. Curtis, to keep a watch upon this house at such hours of the evening as you occupy the rooms, and to permit a servant of mine to watch in your absence, I doubt not it would fulfil our purpose with less suspicion than my presence here might rouse. But if you will not consent, perhaps you would agree to change your lodging.”

Timothy crossed thoughtfully to the casement and looked out. The window overlooked a narrow passage leading from Boat-stall Lane to Cock Alley. The walls on either side were blank, save just opposite his window, where a couple of steps led up to a bright brown door on which was painted the modest sign:

“MADAME GRIEVE. TOILETTE AND COIFFURE.”

A small round window immediately to the left of the doorway was shrouded with a spotless white curtain, the handle and knocker were polished till they shone like gold. The other windows of the house looked on to Boat-stall Lane; in the two lower ones the curtains were drawn aside and a small collection of wigs and curls was displayed. The house

looked innocent enough in the summer twilight, but strangely quiet and deserted.

Timothy shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Why do you not search the house, if you suspect it?" he asked curtly.

"I have made inquiries," answered the mayor; "it would seem that Madame Grieve is well known and appears to be above suspicion. She has lived there for two years past, plying her trade as ladies' hairdresser. I can learn nothing against her."

"Our information is precise," said Josiah Smith, "but it is likely enough the conspiracy is yet in the egg. Yonder is the house where it will hatch."

"But what fashion of conspiracy should it be?" asked Timothy impatiently.

"In favour of the House of Stuart, Mr. Curtis," he answered significantly.

"Ah-h!" Tim started; his thoughts flew to Tracy. "The crazy fools!" he muttered under his breath. He turned and looked thoughtfully at Josiah.

"You are very frank with me," he said; "do you know me, that you would trust me in this affair?"

Josiah bowed. "I am in the service of my Lord Pelham," he said, with meaning.

Tim frowned. He turned again to the window and drummed on the pane. If there were indeed a conspiracy afoot in favour of the Stuart, then Tracy Wimbourne was assuredly at the bottom of it. Moreover if this house were the headspring of the conspiracy, then Tracy was certain sooner or later to be discovered there by any who undertook to watch the place.

Josiah watched him with eager eyes. "May we hope

you will consent to help us, Mr. Curtis?" he asked eagerly.

For a minute Tim hesitated, doubting whether it would not perchance be wiser to consent to spy on the house and thereby reserve to himself the power of warning Tracy; if need be, the chance of saving him. It was a dirty job, this playing for both sides, but perhaps a man should not refuse to soil his fingers in friendship's need.

He wavered. Mr. Simpson again stepped forward.

"If Mr. Curtis refuses," he said blandly, "I would like to remind him that there are—writs."

Josiah sprang forward to silence the speaker, but it was too late; he had said enough to ruin their purpose. The hint of threat, the suggestion of bribery in his words served to confirm Timothy in his reluctance to accede to their proposal.

He turned from the window and crossing the room took up his hat and whip from the table.

"Writs, Mr. Simpson," he said haughtily, "I think not. Such a procedure would hardly add to the attraction of your rooms, and Wiltshire's are sufficiently convenient. I would advise you—and you, too, Mr. Mayor—before you again visit a gentleman on a delicate business such as this to give some further study to matters pertaining to a gentleman's honour."

Cogswell's jaw dropped dolefully. "Then you refuse to help us, Mr. Curtis?" he said.

"I do. Further, I refuse to change my lodgings. And finally," he broke out sharply, "if I find you or yours haunting my rooms or tampering with my servant, by Heaven! mayor or no mayor, I'll have ye arrested for a common housebreaker. Now you've heard my mind on

this matter. Be off—and whistle up your hounds if you dare.”

Cogswell and Simpson turned sullenly and went out, but Josiah paused at the door.

“Mr. Curtis,” he said hurriedly, “I am charged with a message to you—from my Lord Pelham.”

Timothy turned and faced him. He drew the lash of his whip slowly through his fingers and smiled.

“Mr. Josiah Smith,” he said quietly, “if it be, as I surmise, a repetition of a former proposal I received from his lordship, I would advise you to leave that message undelivered. I think you would scarcely relish receiving my answer.”

Josiah bowed hurriedly, and with a shrug of his shoulders followed his companions out of the room.

Timothy laughed softly. “A prudent messenger,” he murmured, “and worthy of his master. Egad! but they are awake at St. James’s. I must warn Tracy, though it would seem from what he said this afternoon that he guessed what’s afoot. But what the murrain he means about those papers the saints only know. Plague take the mayor,” he muttered angrily, struggling into his coat, “what the devil does he mean by his impertinence? Writs, writs!” he grimaced sourly; “well, let them come to-morrow. I have one more night to dream. And now to Cornwallis’s gardens and—moonlight.”

CHAPTER VI

“MOONLIGHT”

THE night was dark, scented, full of mystery. The gardens at Lord Cornwallis's house, three miles from Bath, were brightly illuminated, and the majority of the guests, escaping from the hot rooms, wandered to and fro on the terraced walks, listening to the distant strains of music in the ballroom, and idly watching the summer lightning play across the southern sky. From the shadowed groves in the garden echoed soft whispers and the low murmur of lovers' talk, and ever and anon the hasty rustle of silk skirts and a subdued laugh of triumph bespoke a swain too confident or a nymph too coy.

On a marble seat at the end of the upper terrace sat Celia Winnington, her friend Lucy de Putren beside her, her court grouped round or seated on the low stone wall of the terrace between the coloured lights. Behind her a high box hedge, carved into the likeness of a pierced heart, shadowed the sky, and climbing yellow roses trailed across the back of the seat and nodded their scented heads over her shining curls. It was a merry corner; the silent witchery of the night had no effect upon Miss Celia's following; they talked and laughed gaily, and rivalled one another in the extravagance of their gallantries and the absurdities of their comparisons.

David Beringer, who by a far-sighted diplomacy had obtained possession, earlier in the evening, of his mistress's fan, now reaped the reward of his forethought in a post at

her elbow, where he lounged gracefully, wielding his capture and watching the dimples come and go round the small smiling mouth. Sir Peter Pemberton sat cross-legged at her feet, his youthful ardour heeding neither the inelegance of his posture, the unevenness of the gravel, nor the unpopularity he achieved by adopting a position that effectually prevented another's approach.

“Gad! what a night,” murmured Charles Rathborne, gazing up into the deep azure above them. “What a night for dreams!”

“Rather a night for blessed realities,” said Marcus quietly; “what dream more precious than the present hour?”

“We should ‘out-night’ each other, as Will Shakespeare has it,” said Lucy de Putren, laughing.

“On such a night did seven fond men, I fear,
Sigh for the moon, who sighs for—no man here.

What think you, gentlemen, of my first essay at rhyming?”

“I'll cap you that, madam,” said David Beringer, smiling.

“A challenge? What says your muse? Listen, Celia, and award me the palm.”

David Beringer furled the fan and looked down thoughtfully at the golden head below him.

“His muse deserts him,” laughed Lord Robert Dacre; “she is but a fickle jade and Davie was ever unlucky with the sex.”

“Hush! hush! he has it,” cried Lucy, holding up her hand for silence.

David coughed nervously and gave out his lines:

“On such a night a man, if he be wise,
Will live his hour and risk his Paradise.”

“Bravo! Davie,” cried Marcus. “Bedad, sage advice.”

“I protest you’re profane, Mr. Beringer,” cried Lucy. “Celia, what say you? Is not his verse monstrous immoral?”

“Give us your own version of the night, Miss Winnington,” pleaded Charles Rathborne, leaning toward her. “Is a man fond to sigh for the moon, or should he risk his all boldly, playing for the highest stake?”

Celia looked up into the dark spaces and smiled wisely.

“I am no versemaker, Sir Charles; my lines are as poor and halting as a lame beggar, but I’ll do my best.

“On such a night no man should be afraid
To give his all for naught and feel repaid.

That is my reading of the night’s council.”

“And, by Heaven! a worthy one,” cried Lord Robert. “What say you, gentlemen, should not we, too, follow the night’s counsel, and asking no recompense, save to rejoice in her beauty, fearing no heart-ache so it be in her service, dedicate our homage to—the Moon of Bath?”

“Bravo!” cried Roger Lee, and Peter Pemberton added enthusiastically, “A toast to the Moon of Bath.”

“My hand upon it,” said Oliver Shirley softly.

David Beringer and Charles Rathborne met Lord Robert’s glance and nodded silently, while Marcus laid his hand on his friend’s shoulder in token of agreement. For those were

days when a man did not shame to show his love before the world, nor grudged to offer his homage lest it be rebuffed.

“Who speaks of the moon on a night as dark as Erebus?” asked a deep voice out of the darkness.

“Tracy! Where have you been wandering?” cried Celia. “Where is Laidie?”

“With Lady Cornwallis, at commerce. Her ladyship caught us on the terrace steps; Rory and I fled into the lime walk, and Laidie, like a hero, covered our retreat.”

“Poor Laidie! Tracy, you do play the coward.”

Tracy grimaced humorously. “But commerce, Celia, with her ladyship, on such a night as this! Sure, even your immovable heart would not condemn me to such a fate.”

“Where is Rory now?”

“Rory drew quarry in the lime walk and vanished in pursuit. Lady de Putren, who wears a violet gown freckled with gold leaves?”

Lucy de Putren held up her hands, with a laugh of dismay. “Lud! is Rory on that track? ’Twill lead him far afield.”

“Has no one seen Tim Curtis to-day?” asked Beringer. “I’ve not set eyes on him since morning.”

“I saw him two hours since,” said Tracy carelessly. He crossed to a seat beside Lord Robert. “Bob,” he said, under his breath, “I must speak to you alone.”

“You saw him. He’s whole-limbed and yet not here to-night!” cried Marcus. “Was the man sane?”

“Moonstruck, belike,” said Lord Robert.

“Lud! we are all that here,” laughed Lucy. She leaned back in her seat, her lips close to Celia’s ears, and murmured softly, “Sigh for the moon, who sighs for—no man here. Where is he, my dear, this laggard?”

Suddenly from behind the high hedge at the back of Celia's seat stole the sweet strains of violins, and a rich baritone voice broke softly into song:

“Though stars shine bright in heaven's fair field,
Our sovereign lady of the night
No whit supremacy doth yield
Though stars shine bright.

“Ah! Mistress mine, her counterpart,
No earthly charms compare with thine,
For as the moon to stars thou art,
Ah! Mistress mine!

“Dear Moon of Love, my heart's delight,
The baser moon sails clear above;
Withhold not thou thy fairer light,
Dear Moon of Love.”

The song ceased, the music died away. A round of applause broke the stillness and echoed through the gardens.

“It's that vagabond, Rory,” said Charles Rathborne, peering vainly through the bushes.

Lucy de Putren laughed and shook her head as she looked at Celia's flushed face. What sister's face would blush at sound of a brother's singing?

“Talk of the devil! it's Tim himself,” said Marcus, nodding toward the arch in the hedge where Timothy Curtis appeared, his white brocade gleaming in the darkness.

“Pouring forth music from a pierced heart,” cried Lucy, pointing to the device above their heads. “Lud! I'm monstrous in the vein for poesy to-night, but 'tis mightily wasted on moonstruck wits. Mr. Beringer,” she con-

tinued, rising, “lead me to the supper-room. We will ply our muse in more appreciative company. Sir Oliver, will you not with us?”

David Beringer reluctantly furled Celia’s fan. A hand shot out over his shoulder and took it from his grasp. With a melancholy shrug, he yielded his place to Timothy and followed Lucy de Putren and Oliver along the terrace.

Tracy rose with white, set lips. He had watched Celia’s face during the song; he had noted the blush on her cheeks when Timothy drew near; his heart was sore for her.

“Bob,” he said brusquely, “’tis time we lent Adelaide a pretence to escape. Come with me and effect a rescue.”

As he passed his sister he looked down once more on her happy face and shining eyes.

“Yes,” he muttered, “I will save his honour yet, for her sake.”

A silence fell upon the company; a heavy silence fraught with embarrassment, rich with the consciousness that all present pined to speak words meet to be heard by one ear alone. At last Marcus gave a quick sigh and rose briskly to his feet. He crossed to where Charles Rathborne and Roger Lee stood together, and slipping a hand through either arm wheeled them round to face the terrace.

“Gentlemen,” he said drily, “supper.”

Their retreating footsteps echoed along the walk.

Timothy looked down upon the lonely figure of the youthful Sir Peter, still resolutely ensconced at his mistress’s feet. He drew out his quizzing glass and inspected him thoughtfully, a whimsical smile on his lips. But his banter was lost upon Peter. With a magnificent impudence Tim drew out his purse.

“Peter,” he drawled, “I forgot to pay the musicianers. Find them, there’s a good fellow, and give them their due.” So saying, he dropped his purse into the youth’s hand.

Peter gasped. He looked down at the purse, he looked up at the calmly smiling face of Timothy; he looked despairingly at Celia’s lowered lashes. With a muttered exclamation he struggled awkwardly to his feet and throwing a last angry glance at Timothy, disappeared in the darkness behind the shadowy hedge.

Again a stillness fell upon the terrace. Most of the guests had retreated into the house for supper, the gardens were quieter, only a soft whisper of voices stole from the dusky groves. Here and there a lantern flickered and went out. The heavy-scented roses nodded their heads gravely in the silence, and far in the east a bank of silver-tipped clouds bespoke the rising of the moon.

Timothy stood immovable beside the marble bench, looking down on Celia’s bent head and averted face. He did not speak, he only looked at her with all his soul in his eyes and waited for an answering glance. She was fully conscious of his desire, and for a time fought his will. Her face grew rosy, her white hands clasped and unclasped themselves upon her knee; her lips trembled into a smile. Still he waited in silence. Suddenly her resolution failed. She gave a little sigh of surrender, and, turning, lifted her eyes to his. For one long minute they looked into each other’s eyes in silence, then with a shy smile, half deprecating her surrender, she turned away.

Timothy slipped into a seat on the bench beside her.

“Madam,” he whispered softly, “now, indeed, has the moon risen for me.”

She made no answer to his gallantry. “You are late, Mr.

Curtis,” she said coldly. “Many deemed you had found more attractive company elsewhere.”

“What nonsense! ’Twere but reasonable I had been earlier, had it been possible. And you, madam? Did you, too, think I should fail you?”

Her little pretence at anger vanished. She looked up with a frank smile.

“No, Mr. Curtis,” she said honestly. “I knew that you would come.”

Timothy looked into her honest eyes and drew in his breath quickly.

“You knew? You awaited my coming?” he cried eagerly. “Madam—is it possible—you wished for it?”

For a second she hesitated, then she gave a little helpless laugh. “Yes,” she said simply. “I wished for you.”

Timothy drew nearer; his voice shook with eagerness.

“I am poor,” he said. “And I have lived the life of my class. I’ve no right to woo any woman—least of all women you. But—ah! Mistress Celia, since that morning I met you by the river, since that hour you taught me the meaning of life, I have loved you with all my soul. It’s no pearl of price I offer you, only an uncut stone, but, by Heaven! in your keeping I’d carve it to a setting worthy of your life.”

He put his hand reverently on the folds of her gown, and leaned nearer, trying to see her face.

“I never hoped to tell you this,” he continued softly. “It was enough for me to give you my love, asking nothing. But these last two days, madam, there has come to me a certain dream, a dream of madness, and I have come here to-night to tell it to you.”

She lifted her head and faced him. "What is your dream?" she asked gently.

He bent one knee to the ground and placed his hand softly upon the white hands lying on her lap.

"Mistress Celia, they call you the Moon of Bath—the still cold moon floating so far above us in the heavens of her purity, that she reigns untouched by man's desires. But I have dreamed that on a certain night, dark, silent, like to-night, as I sat alone watching the face of my moon in worship, she stooped and came down from her throne in the heavens—down to my side. And as I looked, half dazzled by that glory, it seemed to me her face—that cold, still face we fear e'en while we worship—was changed to me, and all the glow and all the beauty and all the radiance was warm with the fire of love. Ah! madam, it may be that I was blinded and saw but what my heart desired, and yet I think 'twas even as I saw."

She sat silent, with lowered head. His heart gave a little throb of fear.

"Madam," he said quickly, "if I have dreamed too boldly forgive me. Remember, 'twas you who bade me dare to dream."

She lifted her eyes to his and they were bright with tears.

"Mr. Curtis," she said gravely, "I thank you. And were I indeed the moon in heaven, methinks your love would draw me down to earth. But—I am but a woman, sir, and I have but known you ten short days—and——"

"You fear me, madam?"

"Ah! do not think me faint-hearted," she cried quickly. "But—I do not know—I would not be hurried——"

"Dear heart!" he breathed gently, "it should be enough

for me that I am permitted to tell my love. I will ask no more—as yet.”

She held out her hand with a little gesture of gratitude.

“I am cowardly,” she said, smiling. “But—with a woman it is once and forever.”

“And with a man, too, madam.”

“It may be,” she said, smiling a little wistfully. “But a man does not give his all.”

Timothy shook his head with a smile, but made no answer.

She lifted her hands and clasped them eagerly together.

“You—you do not blame me for my doubt?” she asked anxiously.

He looked down at her with a smile of tenderness.

“Madam,” he said gravely, “I count myself blessed indeed for the hope that you have given me. From to-night you know that my life is at your service, and for the rest I will await your pleasure.” He stood a moment, thinking, then he detached a seal from his fob and continued earnestly: “I will not weary you, Mistress Celia, with a repetition of my dreams, but if the day should dawn when you can give me an answer, will you send me this token as sign that I may speak again?”

She took the seal with a little nod and smile of gratitude.

“I owe you thanks for this courtesy,” she said simply.

She rose, and together they walked along the terrace. Suddenly she stopped and laid her hand on his arm.

“No,” she said, “it is not just that I should accept your service, seeing it may chance that I can make no return.”

He threw up his head and laughed joyously. “It is my own choice, madam. I am well content.”

But she shook her head, dissatisfied.

“No, it is not just.” Gravely she unfastened the heavy

gold bracelet she wore on her wrist and handed it to him. "The world holds many women more worthy than I," she said softly. "If you should—should meet one, send this jewel back to me, and I shall understand."

He took it with a soft laugh of amusement.

"Do you deem it possible that I could so change, Mistress Celia?" he asked, stooping and looking into her eyes.

She lowered her lashes with a bright blush. A smile played about her lips.

"In truth," she said softly, "I am woman enough to hope it may not be so."

He stood aside while she entered the windows of the ballroom. A shooting star swept across the horizon. He looked at it with a rueful smile.

"An evil omen," he muttered; "it falls from heaven! Yet better a falling star than one who has never neared the heavens; it has at least the glory of remembrance."

He followed Celia into the ballroom, but Adelaide was already hurrying her away to take her leave.

"The coach is waiting, Celie, and I am wearied to death. Tracy is returning with Lord Robert later. Come quickly, child."

With a last nod and smile, Celia vanished after her sister, who had not vouchsafed a look in Timothy's direction.

Most of the guests had already taken their departure. Through the door of the supper-room Timothy noted a group of men standing by one of the tables, indulging in a last stirrup cup. Tracy, Lord Robert, and Davie Beringer were among them. All Timothy's world was rose-colour that evening. With an almost boyish longing to share his happiness, to find an outlet for his soaring spirits, he

crossed the room to join them, and striding up to the group, flung his arm lightly across Tracy's shoulder.

“Well, Tracy, old man,” he cried joyously, “have you found your wits again? Come back with me to my lodging and we'll have a hot night together. Lady Wimbourne will forgive for once. 'Tis the first night we've had your company for six weeks, and, begad! we've missed you.”

Tracy's face grew suddenly white. He drew back from the encircling arm and swung round on his heel.

“Mr. Curtis,” he said shortly, “you are a contemptible thief.”

A low mutter of amazement stirred the group of men. Timothy fell back a step and stared at Tracy in bewilderment.

“I repeat, Mr. Curtis,” continued Tracy doggedly, “you are a thief and unworthy the company of honourable gentlemen.”

Timothy sank back against the table, shaking his head. “Still crazy,” he muttered, in humorous bewilderment.

“What the murrain's taken you, Tracy?” cried Oliver Shirley, laying a detaining hand on his arm.

Tracy shook him off and advanced a step toward Tim.

“Do I make myself sufficiently plain?” he asked shortly.

“But—but—demme! I can't fight you, Tracy,” gasped Tim desperately.

“Must I then add ‘coward’ to your name?” asked Tracy insolently.

Timothy's eyes gleamed. Then he looked at Tracy and wavered. “Plague take you!” he muttered testily. “How can I fight a man who has only one leg to stand on?”

“There are pistols, Mr. Curtis.”

"Pistols! Yes. But pistols are so demmed risky," muttered Timothy.

A titter of laughter broke from the men. Tim turned on them angrily. "I don't want to kill the fool," he said testily.

"I am grateful for your mercy, Mr. Curtis," said Tracy with a sneer. "If you are, as I surmise, equally anxious for your own skin, shall we consider that—the name sticks?"

"By gad!" cried Tim furiously, starting to his feet. Then his eyes softened suddenly with remembrance. "Tracy!" he said winningly, holding out his hand.

For answer Tracy flung the contents of his glass in the other's face, and turning away, sank into a chair.

Timothy fell back choked and gasping, with an oath of fury. Then he wiped his eyes, smoothed his ruffles, and looked round the group with hard set mouth.

"It is enough," he said shortly. "You'll act for me, Bob?"

Lord Robert stepped back. "You will excuse me, Mr. Curtis," he said stiffly.

Timothy stared at him. "Egad, sir," he said sharply, "such a refusal bespeaks agreement with Sir Tracy. I deem it an insult, my lord."

Lord Robert bowed and turned away. Timothy looked across at Charles Rathborne.

"Charlie?" he said questioningly.

Charles shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

For a moment Tim's eyes gleamed dangerously. He put up his quizzing glass and surveyed the silent group of men.

"My faith!" he said slowly. "It seems I'm like to have a busy morning."

David Beringer crossed to his side. “I’ll stand your friend, Tim,” he said quietly.

Timothy laid his hand gratefully on his shoulder.

“Thanks, Davie,” he said quietly. “I leave the affair in your hands. Perhaps,” he added, stroking his chin and coolly indicating the group of men with his quizzing glass —“perhaps you will kindly arrange meetings for me with the remainder of these gentlemen during the course of the coming week.”

With a lazy smile he turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER VII

“A SIGH IN THE DARK”

THOUGH barely eleven o'clock, Timothy rode soberly home, and leaving his horse at the Mews (for Simon, not expecting so unwontedly early a return, was not in attendance), climbed the dark stairway to his room.

As he turned the corner of the stair he noted a light shining through the crack of the door, and he muttered a curse at his man's carelessness in leaving candles alight in an unoccupied apartment. A moment later a louder exclamation followed, for in the darkness of the passage he stumbled over a chair and lurched heavily against his door, bursting it open. At the same moment the light inside was extinguished, leaving all in darkness save for the faint glimmer that entered between the window curtains.

Timothy paused in surprise and peered suspiciously through the gloom. Then attributing the sudden extinction of the light to the draught from the opened door, he shut it, and striding across to the window pulled aside the curtains.

Not much light entered: the night had clouded over; neither moon nor stars were visible. Without troubling to relight the candles, Timothy flung himself back into his chair and stared out into the darkness.

The events of the evening had given him much food for thought. It was evident to him that Tracy had learned by some means of Lord Pelham's proposal that he should play the spy upon the Jacobites of his acquaintance; but that he should have believed him capable of accepting the proffered

bribe appeared to Tim alike such unreasonable and such disloyal conduct toward a comrade that his anger stifled his affection, and he hardened his heart at the thought of the duel on the morrow and crushed out the last shred of reluctance to fight his whilom friend. With regard to Lord Robert and Charles Rathborne, his anger at their behaviour knew no bounds.

“They shall answer for it, by heaven! I’ll let no man browbeat me,” he muttered.

Presently softer thoughts stole in upon his anger. He drew out the bracelet Celia had given him, and pressing it to his lips, gave himself up to dreams of happiness. He gave small thought to what she might say about this duel with her brother-in-law; that was Tracy’s affair. He dwelt only upon her gentleness to him that evening, upon the unexpected hope she had given him, upon the unfailing look of trust and kindness in her glance. His eyes softened, his hard-set lips relaxed into a smile of rare tenderness as he pictured her youth and innocence, her faith in all things beautiful and true.

“And two weeks since I was willing to wed at command! Gad! what a blind fool a man can be till love gives him light. Ah! Dame Diana, I owe you many thanks for the wisdom you taught me; small wonder that I worship your counterpart on earth.”

Presently the clouds broke; a heavy shower darkened the night, the fierce rain splashing noisily on the hard, cobbled street. He sat up with a shrug.

“It will be plaguy slippery to-morrow,” he muttered. “It’s lucky we fight with pistols. Where has that rascal put them, I wonder? Best light up and find them.”

He rose and groped his way to the bureau in the corner

to search for his tinder-box. To his surprise, instead of the smooth lid of the desk, his fingers encountered papers and books; it was evident the bureau was open.

"Zounds!" he muttered angrily, "who has been meddling here?"

A sudden quick intake of breath, the short gasping sob of fear, sounded close to his elbow. He stopped with hand arrested, with head turned, peering through the darkness, straining his ears for a repetition of the sound.

There was a deadly stillness in the room. But Timothy knew he had not been mistaken; some one was hiding in the room in the narrow space between the bureau and the wall, some one who had opened his desk, some one who had extinguished the light so suddenly on his unexpected entrance.

Timothy shuffled rapidly among his papers and found his tinder-box, but he did not at once strike a light. Instead he walked slowly back to the table, placed the box beside the candle, and dragging a chair between the bureau and the door flung himself back into it with a well-simulated yawn.

He yawned again, twice, thrice, each time with less vigour.

Presently he began to breathe, with the heaviness and regularity of a sleeper.

Ten minutes passed. Suddenly he heard a little fluttering sigh of relief and the faint rustle of a silken skirt. This latter sound so startled Timothy that for a moment he forgot to snore and the sound ceased abruptly.

"Dem it!" he muttered, "it's a woman."

He stirred and turned in his chair, and presently resumed his heavy breathing. The rustle of the skirt was heard again, nearer to him now—evidently the owner of it was

crossing the room to his side. He shut his eyes and waited. Another moment and he knew she was standing over him, peering down at him through the darkness.

It was an eerie feeling. Timothy's heart beat quickly, wondering what was to come, but he made no sign.

Then soft hands began to move about him, a light fluttering touch, stealing inside his coat, groping for the pocket in his waistcoat. He waited immovable until the fingers were touching the silken pocket-book he carried; then suddenly he threw up his hands and grasped the two slight wrists in a grip of iron.

"Got you!" he cried gaily.

The woman gave a sharp gasp of terror and for a moment stood rigid in his grasp. Then she began to struggle frantically, twisting wildly to free herself from his hold. Timothy laughed softly. Cautiously he brought the two wrists together until he could encircle both with one hand. Then he reached out for his tinder-box.

"Now let me have a look at you, my beauty," he said grimly.

The woman gave a short, hard sob and struggled more wildly than ever, pulling at his arm, but his fingers were like iron bands; she was helpless in his grasp.

"Be still, you little tiger-cat," he muttered; "be still or you'll hurt yourself."

Slowly and with difficulty, while she struggled and wrenched at his arm, he kindled the spark and lit a candle; then he turned to face her. With a sharp cry he dropped her wrists and sprang to his feet, overturning his chair.

"Lady Wimbourne!" he gasped; "Lady Wimbourne!"

Adelaide stood before him with bowed head. Her face and neck were crimson; she breathed in quick frightened

gasps; the ruffle at her sleeve was torn. For a full minute Timothy stared at her in silence, his eyes hard, a look of anger and contempt on his face.

Slowly she lifted her head and faced him.

"Mr. Curtis," she said faintly, "Mr. Curtis, I—" Then she covered her face with her hands and broke into bitter weeping.

Timothy was very tender-hearted. The anger died out of his eyes at the sound of her helpless sobs. He crossed to her side and laid his hand on her arm.

"Ah! don't cry, madam," he said gently; "you have nothing to fear. 'Tis I who must apologise for so mishandling you. But how could I dream—! 'Pon my soul, madam, I'm sorry for you. Come, sit down here and tell me what it is you came to seek."

She sank obediently into the chair he placed for her, and struggled to control her sobs. Tim poured out a glass of water from the carafe on the table and brought it to her. She took it gratefully, and presently her weeping quieted and she drew out her kerchief and dried her eyes. Timothy gave a sigh of relief; he had dreaded an attack of hysterics.

He took a seat on the edge of the table beside her and stared down at her in bewildered pity.

"Now, madam," he said gently, "what can I do for you?"

She turned to him with outstretched hands, with pitiful pleading face.

"Ah! have pity, have pity," she cried. "Spare Tracy."

"Madam!" he stammered. His thoughts flew instantly to the duel. "How the plague do women hear about these things?" he muttered testily.

But Adelaide knew nothing of the scene in the supper-

room; her thoughts were centred round the dreaded betrayal of her husband's conspiracy. So they talked at cross purposes, neither fully comprehending the other's words.

“Ah!” she pleaded, “you are his friend. Surely—surely you would not bring his death upon him.”

“*His* death! Why, madam, how know you it means *his* death? That's plaguy uncertain,” he added with a grim laugh.

“Ah! sir, certain or only possible, what is that to a distracted wife?” she cried desperately. “I think only of the danger. You cannot deny the danger.”

Timothy shrugged his shoulders. It appeared his share of the risk was not to be considered.

“Whatever danger Tracy is in, he has brought it on himself,” he said shortly, “I bore him no ill-will.”

“I know, I know,” she said eagerly; “he has been reckless—foolish. But you should be the last to blame him—you who know him so well, you who understand his opinions——”

“Plague take me if I do understand his opinions at all, madam,” he answered angrily. “I write him down clean crazed.”

She beat her hands together desperately, seeking arguments by which to move him.

“Ah! think, think,” she pleaded; “remember what you and Tracy have been to one another. Why, times have been when I have been jealous of you—I, because Tracy gave you so much of his heart. And even yet he loves you. In spite of all he would have saved you, his friend.”

“Monstrous queer notion of showing friendship,” muttered Tim between his teeth. He stared down at her for a

minute in gloomy silence. "Look you, madam," he broke out at last, "'tis to Tracy you should plead. If he will retract I'll be only too thankful to——"

Her eyes gleamed angrily. "Retract!" she cried scornfully. "You know Tracy. Do you dream that any dangers, any entreaties would induce him to retract? No; it lies with you and with you only to save him. Ah! Mr. Curtis, have pity. If not for Tracy's sake, then for mine; for— for Celia's sake. She loves him so."

Timothy flushed. "But, Lady Wimbourne," he argued, "you don't understand. In affairs of this sort a gentleman cannot go back on his engagements."

"A gentleman!" she cried with a scornful inflection on the word. Then she stopped and bit her lip. "No, no!" she cried; "I did not mean that; I have no right to judge you— after to-night. I can only beg you to have pity. For the others I ask nothing; do to them as you will"—she shuddered as she spoke—"but for Tracy—ah! be pitiful. On my knees I beg you to spare him."

She sank on to her knees before him and seized his hand in hers. Timothy flushed darkly and sprang to his feet.

"For heaven's sake, madam!" he cried, "be reasonable. Why, plague take me, here's a fuss over a trifle."

She looked at him with deep reproach. "A trifle! Mr. Curtis, do you deem Tracy's life a trifle to me? Ah! I think you should know a little what it is to love. By your love, by your devotion to her you love, I adjure you, be pitiful."

He looked at her gloomily. "You don't understand what you are asking of me, madam," he said slowly; "but there, I can't refuse you. It shall be as you wish. I'll—spare

Tracy.” He spoke the last words with a half-mocking grimace and held out his hand with a smile.

For a second she hesitated, then she placed her hand in his outstretched palm. “Whatever you may be to others, Mr. Curtis, to-night at least you have played the man of honour.”

Tim lifted his eyebrows whimsically.

“It would seem your ladyship has the plaguiest ill-notion of my character,” he said.

She eyed him scornfully. “Is that to be wondered at? There are certain codes of honour, Mr. Curtis, of which even we women cannot forgive the breach.”

Tim lost his temper. “Then may I ask, madam, what honourable occupation you were engaged upon when I interrupted you this evening?”

She started back as though he had struck her, her face flushed crimson.

“Ah! don’t ask me,” she moaned. “I was mad. But it was for Tracy’s sake. And for his sake I would risk—even my honour. Ah! I love him so.”

Timothy relented. “There, there, madam,” he said gently, “we’ll sink the matter. And now I must take you home. It’s too late for you to be about.”

But even as he spoke voices broke the stillness below; heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stair.

Timothy was across the room in a second and bolted the door.

“It’s Beringer,” he said hurriedly, “come to tell me what has been arranged for to-morrow. They mustn’t see you, madam. Will you wait in the inner room till I am rid of them?”

Adelaide hesitated. "Cannot I go out by another door?" she asked.

"There is none. Quick, madam," he added as a heavy knock resounded on the door and the handle was violently rattled.

She followed him into the inner room. He placed a chair for her at the far side of the apartment.

"You'll understand, madam," he said, smiling, "those rascals won't know of your presence, and maybe the tone of the conversation won't be suited to your ears."

She flushed. "Rest assured, Mr. Curtis," she said with a faint smile, "I will not listen at the door."

Timothy threw a rapid glance round the outer apartment to assure himself that no trace of her presence remained. Then he crossed to the outer door and flung it open with a yawn. David Beringer entered quickly, followed by Roger Lee, a tall, dark, impulsive man with bad-tempered lines round his mouth. They were drenched with rain, muddy to the knees, and both wore an air of resolute and unflinching cheerfulness.

"Gad! Tim, how you sleep," cried Beringer, flinging off his coat. "We've knocked loud enough to wake the stiffs down in the Abbey yonder. Shows you have plaguy steady nerves."

Roger Lee crossed to the sideboard and poured himself out a glass of wine.

"Phew! what a night it is," he muttered, shrugging his damp shoulders. "We've settled your affair for you, Curtis. To-morrow, in the meadow behind the wood by Charity Farm. We take the air at eleven."

"It's a late hour," explained Beringer; "but there is small

fear of interruption there. And the hour is to suit his convenience.”

“I’m much obliged to you both—” began Tim slowly.

“Pish, man!” said Beringer, interrupting him with a laugh.

“Only too glad to see you through the affair,” said Roger Lee. “I’m only sorry there is to be no rapier play. ’Twould have been plaguy slippery, but ’tis a pleasure to watch you at the work.”

“What of the others?” asked Tim slowly.

Beringer laughed. “Egad, you fire-eater! Settle this affair with Wimbourne first, and if Bob and Charlie don’t offer an apology we can arrange a meeting later.”

“I don’t ask what is your quarrel with Tracy,” said Roger Lee, pausing to see if any information was forthcoming, “but I must say he has the most demmed ungentlemanly way of insulting I have ever seen.”

He lifted the box of duelling pistols from the sideboard and carried them to the table. “Are these in order?” he asked. “Have you had any practice lately?”

“Are there any little affairs I can attend to for you?” asked Beringer, glancing at the disordered papers in the bureau.

Tim did not answer. He sat gloomily on the arm of a chair, playing with his snuff-box and staring at the ground.

The two men looked at him in surprise and exchanged glances. Then Beringer put his hand on his shoulder.

“What’s the matter with you, Tim?” he asked sharply. “Have you no stomach for the fight?”

Tim roused himself. “I’m very grateful to you two for the trouble you’ve taken in this affair. But the fact of the matter is I—I’ve decided not to fight Wimbourne.”

"Not to fight him!" cried Lee. "Has he apologised?"

"No," said Tim coolly, "nor is he likely to do so."

Lee strode round the table and stared at him angrily.

"You—you're making fools of us, Curtis. You must meet your man now. The affair has gone too far to be settled without an apology."

Tim shrugged his shoulders and took a pinch of snuff.

"I can't fight Wimbourne," he said doggedly.

"But why not? What ails you, man?" asked Beringer.

"I know you and Tracy were friends, but you did your best this evening to keep out of the affair. Tracy forced it upon you."

"Perhaps Mr. Curtis doesn't recollect that he has been dubbed 'thief' and 'coward' in public," said Roger Lee stiffly.

Tim flushed, but outwardly preserved his cool demeanour.

"My mind is fixed. I shall not fight Wimbourne," he repeated. "You'll oblige me by carrying to him my message."

"By heaven! that I shall not," burst out Lee angrily. "I'd have you know, Mr. Curtis, I hold your conduct most insulting. I'll bear a challenge for any man, but demme if it's a gentleman's work to carry round the white feather."

Tim shut his snuff-box with a snap. His eyes gleamed.

"And I'd have you know, Lee," he said curtly, "I'll not have my conduct called in question by you or any man."

"Egad! a man who sits down under the name of coward is like to have his conduct freely questioned," retorted Lee with a sneer. "I'll be obleeged, Mr. Curtis, if you will number me with Sir Tracy and Lord Robert in this affair."

He seized his hat, and turning on his heel with a scornful gesture, strode out of the room.

Timothy watched him depart with a whimsical smile and

a shrug of his shoulders. He glanced up at Beringer questioningly out of the corner of his eyes.

“Well, Davie?” he asked.

Beringer looked at him with troubled brows.

“Tim, this is impossible. There are some things a man can’t do.”

“True, and I can’t fight Tracy.”

“You know what interpretation will be put upon it?”

“An interpretation I can silence.”

“You will have to fight half Bath to do so.”

“Possibly. Will you act for me again?”

Beringer flushed. “Plague on you, Tim, I don’t understand you,” he said huskily. “I—I’ll see you in the morning. Maybe you will have found your senses then.”

He picked up his coat and with a last puzzled look took his departure.

Tim sat silent till the echoing footsteps died away in the lane below; then he lifted his head with a defiant smile.

“It seems,” he said slowly, “I’m in a fair way to have a demmed busy morning before me.”

He gave a sudden sigh, and crossing the room to the inner door, called Adelaide.

“Your way is clear now, madam,” he said. “If you will permit me, I will take you home. The rain is over.”

Without a word she pulled her hood about her face and accepted his guidance down the dark stairs. Silently they paced the deserted streets. When they neared the turning into St. James’s Parade she stopped and laid her hand on arm.

“I have your word that you will spare Tracy?” she asked. “I can trust you?”

“Would you like me to swear it, madam?” he asked a little impatiently.

She hesitated, then shook her head. “No, you have been very good to me to-night. I cannot believe evil of you. It must be that—that you did not think of things as—as we do. But I will trust you to keep your word to a woman.”

They walked on to the beginning of the parade, where she stopped and turned to dismiss him.

“It is wiser that I go on alone now,” she said hurriedly. “My maid is watching to open for me. Mr. Curtis, my honour is in your hands. No one must know what I have done to-night.”

“Your honour is safe, Lady Wimbourne.”

She looked at him a moment in hesitation, then added wistfully:

“I would crave yet a third boon if I might.”

“What is it, madam?” he asked gently.

“That you have pity upon Celia. Spare her the knowledge of a woman’s strife betwixt love and duty.”

“Madam, I would die for her,” he said softly.

She sighed. “I believe you, sir. So would many men. It is so much easier to die for a woman than to have pity upon her weakness.”

She turned and left him without waiting for his answer, and he strode gloomily back to his rooms, puzzling over her words.

CHAPTER VIII

“A PELICAN IN THE WILDERNESS”

THE Christopher Inn shared with the three famous coffee houses of Bath the favours of men of fashion as a convenient breakfast centre after the morning glass at the Pump Room. It was essentially a bachelor haunt. It lacked the dainty appurtenances of Wiltshire's rooms, the feminine attractions of the Toy-Shop Tavern; but the cooking far excelled that of any other inn in the neighbourhood, and the number of small rooms were excellently suited to the private breakfasts followed by morning gaming parties, so much in vogue at that period.

Number 7, the room most in request, was a long narrow apartment in the upper story, with three tall windows looking out upon the High Street opposite the Guildhall. It was approached by a separate staircase and passage, and at ten o'clock on the morning of July 10th it was crowded to the utmost limit of its accommodation. Sir Tracy Wimbourne had commanded a breakfast for twenty, and despite the early hour, it was a merry party. Wild shouts of laughter rang through the room, floating out through the open windows, waking the echoes of the quiet sunlit street, and causing grave mercers to shake their heads sourly or to smile in jocular sympathy, according as trade was good or bad, or they themselves merrily or otherwise inclined.

At last the breakfast was ended. The tables were cleared, and for half an hour after the servants had left the room,

the company played steadily, gathered in little groups about the various tables, sorting the cards and naming the stakes with monotonous regularity. Then Tracy rose to his feet.

Immediately every man threw down his cards, and still sitting at the tables all turned to face their host. Tracy drew some papers from his inner pocket, and leaning his elbow on the chimneypiece proceeded to open them and scan their contents.

“Er—look to the door, Noll, would you?” he said slowly. “Has any one seen David Beringer this morning?”

Sir Oliver Shirley opened the door and looked down the passage. It was empty, and nodding reassuringly at Tracy, he returned to his seat.

“I saw Beringer this morning,” said Roger Lee shortly. “He should be here anon. He has news for you, Wimbourne,” he added, with a scornful curl of his lip.

Tracy lifted his eyebrows. “Well, we’ll not wait for him. To business. I received a despatch this morning. There is news and we must be stirring. The Prince sailed from Dunkirk on the second day of the month.”

A stir went through the assembly. Men lifted their heads eagerly, with that light in their eyes, that is only awakened by a call to arms; the fighting spirit of youth warmed their blood.

“So it has come at last,” muttered Roger Lee with a long sigh of satisfaction. “At last!”

Rory poised the king of spades on the tips of his fingers, and with a flip sent the card spinning across the room. “There goes Geordie,” he said mockingly, “back to his country house.”

Tracy resumed his explanation. “The Prince was accom-

panied by two frigates, both well supplied with arms and ammunition. His landing place is uncertain, but it is probable, if the way lies clear, they will run in as near Bristol as possible, somewhere on the South Wales coast. Kelly will send a messenger to me directly he lands and we must be ready at once for action. All the risings are to be, as far as possible, simultaneous.”

“What is the plan?” asked Marcus.

“When the signal is given we seize the gates and bridges, occupy the Guildhall and the quarters of the City Guard. We hold the town for King James, enroll and drill volunteers, fortify the walls and prepare to give the Prince a royal welcome. There are twenty of us here, with our servants we number at least fourscore. There are sixty gentlemen in Bath and as many again in the neighbourhood prepared to declare for the Stuart when he lands in England. We shall have half the mercers and all the ’prentices on our side; all the arms and ammunition will be in our hands, and we shall hold the gates. The affair should go almost without bloodshed.”

“And in the meantime—until we hear from the Prince?” asked Charles Rathborne eagerly.

“We must keep the affair silent, but so far as we can without exciting suspicions test the politics of the town-folk. And we must get the arms into the town and safely bestowed at Madame Grieve’s, ready for the signal.”

“You are sure there is safe hiding for them at Madame Grieve’s?” asked Lord Stavely.

“Safe as the grave. Egad! the patience of that woman! For two years she has lived there waiting for this chance. She has her regular customers who can speak for her honesty; she has their hours fixed and knows their comings

and goings. They may watch her, they may search the house; they will scent nothing. For two years she has sacrificed herself to suit the whims and fads of her customers, all for the chance of this hour. A woman's loyalty, gentlemen, is a miracle."

Rory laughed softly. "Faith, that's true. But 'tis loyalty to the man, not to the King. Jamie had a tongue in's youth, and Marie Grieve has not yet forgot 1715."

Lord Robert frowned. "And is her devotion to be decried because love, not loyalty, may be the source?" he asked sternly.

A soft whistle was heard without, hurried steps ascending the stair.

"'Twill be David Beringer," said Oliver, opening the door.

Beringer entered. He looked flushed and angry and muttered an excuse for his tardy appearance. Roger Lee crossed to his side.

"Well," he asked, "what does he say? Has morning brought counsel?"

Beringer shook his head. "He'll not fight," he said surlily.

Lee gave a mocking laugh. "We've news for you, Wimbourne," he said. "Your cock last night crowed too loudly. Mr. Curtis withdraws his challenge and will not fight with you."

Tracy wheeled round and faced the speaker.

"Not fight!" he gasped. "He'll not fight me? Why?"

Roger shrugged his shoulders. "Presumably because in his opinion 'pistols are too demmed risky,'" he quoted with a sneer.

Tracy stood silent, staring at the ground. Lord Robert crossed to his side; his eyes gleamed angrily.

“He refuses to fight you. Tracy, isn’t that enough to prove his treachery? In justice you must give him over to our hands now.”

“Some one is coming,” said Oliver quietly.

The men turned in their seats and mechanically took up their cards. A moment later there was a knock at the door and a servant entered with a packet, which he handed to Lord Stavely, who lodged at the Christopher Inn.

“From London, my lord. By express.”

Stavely dismissed the man, and opening the packet, began to read the contents.

The men talked eagerly together, discussing the news from France and casting curious looks at Lord Robert, who stood whispering to Tracy, insistently urging his claim.

A sudden exclamation from Stavely startled them. He had risen to his feet with crimson face and eyes blazing with passion.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “here is the most damnable treason. I have received a despatch from Sir Thomas Winnington.”

Rory was playing idly with the cards, balancing one upon the other as children build card castles. He looked up with a quick smile.

“Well,” he asked, “what says my revered uncle that is so damned treasonable?”

Stavely eyed him impatiently. “He writes me that he has proof that Pelham has paid £5,000 to a gentleman of our company to watch the friends of the Stuart and betray to him our plans. We have a spy among us.”

The effect of his words was instantaneous. Men sprang to their feet with clenched fists, with gleaming eyes. Rage, fear, suspicion were written on every face. A low, menacing cry echoed through the room.

"His name? His name?"

"He has no information as to his name," answered Stavely. "He can but assert 'tis one of our company."

Every man glanced at his neighbour with quick suspicion, with incredulous wonder. Rory Winnington looked round the circle with a careless shrug.

"But has no man a clue to offer?" he asked.

Lord Robert laid his hand on Tracy's arm.

"Is it to be you or I?" he said softly.

Tracy stepped forward. "Gentlemen," he said quietly, "there is no need for Sir Thomas to tell us the name of the spy. I know him and can prove his guilt."

Rory steadily balanced another story on his castle.

"Ah!" he said thoughtfully. "You know him? His name then, Tracy."

"Timothy Curtis!"

Rory's card castle crashed to the ground; he turned to Tracy a face of incredulous surprise.

"Tim Curtis? Tim? Great heavens, Tracy, what mad-brained maggot are you hunting now?"

"Wimbourne, you can prove this?" asked Stavely gravely.

"You may rest assured, gentlemen, I should not bring such an accusation were I not able to prove it. Mr. Curtis has himself admitted Lord Pelham's bribe. But further than this, I have reason to believe he has stolen from—from my household papers dealing with this affair of the Prince's landing, which were intrusted to me by Captain McFee—papers of such import that he holds our lives in his hands."

"Since when have you known this, Wimbourne?" asked Lord Stavely quickly.

"Since yestereven. I am to blame, gentlemen, that I did not earlier intrust you with the matter. But the loss of

the papers was my affair; I wished to deal with him myself. I was to have met him this morning, and trusted I might have the fortune to kill him in fair fight."

Lord Stavely bowed his head gravely, and the others nodded acceptance of his explanation. They guessed that his wife was concerned in the matter, and though the suspicions of many were far afield from the truth, they understood his desire to move alone in the affair.

"I was with Tracy in the matter," said Lord Robert, "though 'twas against my will he kept it secret. But now Mr. Curtis refuses to fight. What is to be done now?"

"The man must die," said Lord Stavely sternly. The others nodded acquiescence.

"But if he will not fight?" urged Charles Rathborne.

"We will force him to do so," cried Roger Lee fiercely. "I have an affair with him myself. I shall send him a challenge this morning."

"But Mr. Curtis, it would seem, exercises his own discretion in the acceptance or refusal of a challenge," said Lord Robert sneeringly.

Beringer stepped forward. "Tim Curtis is no coward," he said unsteadily. "I believed last night his refusal to fight was based on the score of friendship for Tracy. I deemed him ready enough to take the air with any other gentleman. But if Tracy is right in his accusation, then I say frankly I do not understand the man; it may be he will refuse every challenge. Only he is no coward."

"For myself," said Marcus quietly, "I do not cross swords with a spy."

Lord Stavely shook his head. "The man must be silenced," he repeated.

"Just so. We can force him to fight," cried Rathborne.

"We will challenge him one by one. Surely we'll kill him amongst us."

A murmur of assent echoed through the room. Lord Robert held up his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "our first consideration must be not what we owe to Mr. Curtis, nor how to secure the safety of our own necks, but rather how to protect the interests of the Prince. Suppose we all challenge Mr. Curtis, and suppose he accepts our challenge; what then? There is no man among us, given ordinary luck, who can hold his own against Curtis with the rapier. I speak plainly, gentlemen, you must pardon me—the moment demands it. There is, I am well assured, no man here who would let such a consideration weigh with him for a moment did he deem it his duty to meet Mr. Curtis. But there are, as I say, other considerations. If we stand up one by one to be pinked by this fellow, how is the Prince's service to be forwarded? Gentlemen, we must not let our natural desire to punish this man blind us in this matter."

Indignant protest, incoherent mutterings of agreement or anger rang through the room. Tracy laid his hand on Lord Robert's arm.

"You are right, Bob," he said. "I would not listen to you last night, but you are right. The Prince must come first. We must not waste ourselves on private quarrels."

"But if we can't meet him in fair fight, what's to be done with the fellow?" cried Rathborne impatiently.

"There is but one way to silence him," began Lord Stavely slowly.

"Would you assassinate him?" asked Rory bluntly.

Stavely nodded. "'Tis his life or ours."

There was a moment's silence, broken by Marcus.

“I’ll have no hand in the matter,” he said slowly. “We are a company of gentlemen, not cut-throats.”

“But in the Prince’s service, Sir Marcus—” began Stavely.

“In no man’s services should it be required of a gentleman to soil his fingers with assassination,” answered Marcus.

Tracy intervened. “Gentlemen,” he said, “Timothy Curtis was my friend, and—the man’s been tempted. Though I am ready to go to extremes to silence him if need be, I—we all—would gladly be spared the necessity. Why, then, should we not kidnap him simply, keep him close till the affair is through, and then leave it to the Prince to deal with him as he chooses? Gentlemen, I move we adopt that plan; further, that Mr. Lee, Lord Stavely and Sir Charles Rathborne take the responsibility of the affair. You must make your own arrangements, gentlemen, but it should be to-morrow night at latest, and, in the meantime, he must be shadowed, that he does not escape us. You will recollect further, gentlemen, the affair must be kept absolutely quiet.”

“But in the meantime,” objected Sir Marcus, “I cannot meet Mr. Curtis as though nothing were afoot. The man is a spy—I cannot treat him as a gentleman.”

“Nor I,” cried half a dozen voices.

“Nor I, demme,” said Roger Lee vindictively.

“It will not be necessary,” said Lord Robert quietly. “One does not extend the hand of fellowship to one who has been dubbed a thief and a coward and who shrinks from calling his accuser to account. We shall be fully justified on that score in refusing Mr. Curtis’s acquaintance.”

There was a low exclamation from David Beringer, who

stood by the window; the others crowded round him and looked down into the street below.

Down the opposite causeway in the full glare of the bright sunlight strolled Miss Celia Winnington, her blue dress shimmering, her bright eyes shining, her fair curls dancing beneath the wide brim of her hat. Beside her walked Timothy Curtis, leaning toward her to listen to her words, his face wearing a look of blissful content. Behind them marched an elderly maid, her duenna-like primness so far relaxed as to smile on the couple in front. Celia was laughing and chattering gaily in evident appreciation of her company, and once, when she lifted her eyes and met his glance, her face crimsoned sweetly with blushes and her lips dimpled into a smile of happiness. They passed slowly down the street and disappeared round the corner.

The watchers turned away from the window and eyed each other in silence. Then Rory Winnington broke into his low mocking laugh.

"Egad!" he said, "it's well for Tim Curtis that the Prince is to deal with him. He'd have short shrift otherwise, I'm thinking. Come, Tracy, is the sitting over? I'm due on the Walks at noon."

"There is no more to be done at present," answered Tracy, "save to be in readiness. Stavelly, we leave Mr. Curtis in your hands." He took Lord Robert's arm and the two men left the room, talking eagerly together in low tones.

Some of the company sat down again to cards, but the majority hurried out into the sunshine and dispersed about their various pursuits.

Meanwhile, Celia and Timothy dawdled happily down Staul Street, through the Abbey Green and out on to the

South Parade. They looked into the Toy-Shop to read the news and examine the knick-knacks; they called at three mercers' in search of a ribband, and they paused at Lewis's famous book-shop to see the latest political squibs. At length, in the course of an hour, they reached the end of the South Parade and stopped to look out over the wide prospect of Beechen Cliff with its beautiful hanging woods a-shimmer in the dancing sunlight. Celia broke into a soft laugh of sheer happiness.

“Oh! the adorable world! the adorable world!” she cried; “how heavenly it is to-day!”

A bright butterfly fluttered by her, darting and swooping hither and thither in an aimless joyance of heart, like the music of a child's untutored song. Celia pointed to it with a smile.

“The spirit of the morning, Mr. Curtis.”

Timothy laughed. “Lud! madam, a mighty idle one. Do not the divines teach us that the butterfly is a monster of iniquity and sloth? I protest we don't merit the comparison, we've been mightily diligent this morning. You should liken us to his reverence, the bee.”

Celia shook her head. “No, no, I would rather play the butterfly. For the bee—methinks his virtue doth protest too much. Moreover all his toil is for his own welfare. But the butterfly makes the world more beautiful by simply living in it.”

“Then, madam, you do indeed play the butterfly,” said Tim softly.

She laughed and flushed. “A truce to gallantry, Mr. Curtis, and attend my serious discourse. Indeed, the butterfly deserves your esteem. If man or woman be called upon to work let them fulfil that duty with great-hearted

zeal; they will be rewarded here and hereafter. But for us—and the butterfly—of whom 'twould seem God demands no work, may there not be some merit even in rejoicing in the sunshine, and giving thanks?"

Timothy gazed after the fluttering wings with a smile in his eyes. "And when the sunshine passes, madam?" he asked.

"The butterfly disappears. When, pray, saw you a drenched and dismal butterfly to rend your heart with thoughts of gloom? If he cannot rejoice in the sunshine, making the world brighter by his happiness, he will not make it sour by his pain. He hides his head till the storm passes, bearing his trouble alone."

"Egad, madam, he's a rare blade. 'Twould seem you've given much study to the subject."

She laughed. "Is there not rare opportunity in Bath? 'Tis not a town that shelters many bees."

He looked down at her thoughtfully. "I think, Mistress Celia, you have a rare charity. There are not many who can find virtue in a life of idleness."

"Indeed, sir, virtue may lurk in every life. It may prove as hard for a butterfly to preserve his nobility in idleness as it seemingly is for the bee to be silent at his work."

She turned, and together they traversed the parade and strolled on towards the entrance to the Walks, which at that hour were crowded with pedestrians. Here Lucy de Putren came to meet them. She looked curiously at Timothy, and slipping her arm through Celia's, walked along between them.

"Mr. Curtis," she said slowly, "the air of the Walks is not very wholesome for you this morning. Take my advice and ride in the country to-day."

Timothy lifted his eyebrows. “I don’t follow you, Lady de Putren,” he said, laughing; “but I’ve such a spirit of inquisitiveness that if I do but hear a place is unwholesome, the devil in it if I can resist going there to try.”

Lucy de Putren shrugged her shoulders and they walked on toward a group of acquaintances chattering eagerly together.

Celia paused beside them. “Good-morning,” she said gaily; “what is the news?”

They turned to greet her gladly, but at sight of her companion a look of constraint fell upon them and an awkward silence ensued.

“Egad!” cried Timothy, laughing, “here’s mystery. Whose reputation were you—heightening, Lady Belper? I warrant the story is tastily seasoned unless Digby’s genius has forsaken him. Eh, Digby?”

Sir Ralph Digby, the most noted rattle of the year, turned on his heel without a word and strode away. Lady Belper turned her shoulder to Tim, and pointedly ignoring his remark, began to talk to Lucy de Putren. Celia looked from one to the other with wondering eyes.

Two or three men gathered round her, exercising their wits in such compliments as were deemed due to the Queen of Bath. Twice Timothy attempted to join in the conversation, but his remarks and his presence were pointedly ignored. He withdrew to the edge of the group and stood swinging his quizzing glass and biting his lips in puzzled vexation.

Presently Celia turned to walk on, and gave him a smiling invitation to escort her. Lucy de Putren accompanied them, but the others drew together again and continued their conversation.

The three passed on down the Walks. Here again the same conduct was repeated: hats were doffed, hands were waved to Celia and Lucy de Putren, but all Tim's salutations were passed over without acknowledgment; it was plain he was being deliberately slighted.

Celia glanced up at him curiously. His face was flushed and his lips twitched nervously, otherwise he gave no sign that he noted anything unusual.

"It seems, Mr. Curtis," she said slowly, "you are somewhat unpopular this morning."

He looked down on her with a quiet smile. "It seems so, madam. But with your permission I will seek a more convenient occasion to—demand the cause of my—er—unpopularity."

She nodded and smiled at his forbearance. At the end of the Walks she paused.

"I'd be obleeged if you would fetch me a chair, Mr. Curtis," she said. "I have walked for more than an hour."

He turned away to do her bidding. She laid an eager hand on Lady de Putren's arm.

"Lucy, what does it all mean? Why in heaven's name is every one so—so insolent to Mr. Curtis?"

"Lud, Celia, I don't understand the rights of it, and I like Tim Curtis—you know that well. But it seems he and Tracy quarrelled last night at Lord Cornwallis's house. A meeting was arranged, but this morning Mr. Curtis has withdrawn and refuses to meet Tracy, because, so the story goes, he thinks pistols 'too demmed risky.' In short, 'tis said he prefers to be dubbed coward."

"He and Tracy quarrelled! But, Lucy, he is Tracy's trustiest friend. How could they quarrel?"

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. "Tracy has a cause for

quarrel against him now, it seems. 'Tis said he called him a thief yesterday and gave him the lie, and Mr. Curtis has swallowed it as meekly as the veriest calf.”

Celia turned and looked down the Walks on the brightly dressed groups passing to and fro. Her eyes were shining, her breast heaving with emotion. There was a tender light in her eyes.

“Lucy,” she said softly, “I deem Mr. Curtis the most courtly gentleman in England. His friend (Heaven only knows why) insults him grossly; he bears the brand of coward and the scorn of all his acquaintances, and yet despite all he will not draw his sword on Tracy, because he knows——”

She stopped with a little conscious laugh. Lucy looked at her curiously.

“Because he knows what, Celia?”

Celia blushed and laughed again. “Because Tracy is his friend. Because he knows if ill befell Tracy it would bring trouble upon—Adelaide.”

“On Adelaide!” said Lucy, meeting Celia’s eyes and laughing. “The courtly gentleman! On Adelaide or on—somebody else? Lud, child, if that’s your interpretation, small wonder you find no heart to blame.”

“Blame!” she cried. “Lucy, they call me Queen of Bath. A queen should lead, not follow the judgment of others. I will show those impertinents yonder where the blame lies. Ah! here he comes.”

She turned to Timothy with the sweetest smile of welcome.

“Mr. Curtis, I am sorry I troubled you; I prefer to walk home. Will you not escort me?”

She placed her hand on his arm, and nodding a farewell to Lucy, walked slowly down the terrace, chattering gaily

and smiling up at him with such a sweet look of trust in her eyes that Timothy's heart beat high with happiness, and all his soul went out in an honest prayer that he might be worthy to serve her.

As they passed every quizzing glass was raised and every eye was fixed upon them, but Celia took no more notice of the nodding heads and becking hands than if they had been so many waving flowers. Totally ignoring all salutations, she walked slowly past the astounded groups, talking calmly to her companion, until they reached the end of the terrace and turned into Abbey Green.

Dead silence fell upon the terrace as they passed, but directly they had disappeared the talk, the whispers, the laughter broke out more loudly than ever. Bath had not known such a sensation for fully a fortnight. Women lifted their eyebrows at one another and laughed behind their fans; men scowled at the ground and muttered angry threats, while the wits hurried from group to group modestly repeating their laboured aphorisms upon the scene. The most favoured opinion was that Miss Winnington must be ignorant of the gossip concerning Mr. Curtis; the most general desire was to know what Sir Tracy and Lady Wimbourne would say.

But Timothy, as he walked by Celia's side, forgot his humiliation, forgot his anger, forgot all save that his lady smiled on him as never before and chose him out before all the world to be distinguished by her favour. In blissful silence they walked side by side to St. James's Parade. They turned the corner and found themselves face to face with Lord Robert Dacre and Tracy Wimbourne.

The two men stopped dead. Tracy looked from Tim to Celia and his face grew white. For a moment his eyes

threatened an outbreak of passion. Lord Robert stepped forward and laid a hand on his arm. With an effort Tracy swallowed his anger, and ignoring the presence of her companion, turned to his sister-in-law.

“Celia,” he said quietly, “this gentleman has been sufficiently in your company. I will take you home.”

There was a moment’s silence. Celia looked from Tracy’s angry face to Tim’s hard-set mouth and hesitated. Then she met Lord Robert’s warning glance, and with quick tact obeyed her brother-in-law. She held out her hand to Tim with a sweet smile of friendship.

“It has been a morning to remember, Mr. Curtis,” she said brightly. “If you choose to come for it, you shall have my hand in the first country dance at the Rooms to-night. I will trouble you no longer now. Au revoir.”

Tim took his dismissal without comment. He kissed her hand, looked once into her eyes, and then, not casting a glance at the two men, stood aside and watched her walk up the street between her escort. At the door she turned, waved her white hand once in farewell, and disappeared into the house.

Then, his heart singing a love pæan, but his thoughts dark with anger, he marched to the stables, mounted his horse and rode out through the sunshine up on to the freedom of Claverton Down. There he galloped till his anger had vanished and all his future showed bright with love.

Celia quietly mounted the stairs to the drawing-room without a word. Then she turned on her brother-in-law with the light of anger in her blue eyes. “Tracy,” she said firmly, “I’ll be obleeged if you’ll explain to me what this means. No, Lord Robert, do not leave us. I’ll be pleased to hear your explanation, too.”

The two men eyed each other uncomfortably, and Tracy looked to the door for his wife. Celia read his look.

“No, Tracy, you need not call Adelaide. I wish your own explanation as to why you choose to insult a gentleman—a loyal friend of mine, in my presence.”

Tracy pulled himself together. “I had hoped, Celia, Mr. Curtis would himself have seen the propriety of avoiding your company. As he refuses to do so, ’tis for you to dismiss him. We—we’ve been mistaken in him. He is not worthy to be honoured by your acquaintance.”

Celia seated herself elaborately. “You and he were friends?” she asked slowly. “It would seem a man slips the chain of friendship easily these days. But it is not so with a woman. I’ll be obleeged, Tracy, if you’ll be more explicit in your explanation.”

Tracy crossed the room and seated himself beside her.

“Celia,” he pleaded, “I’d rather not be explicit. ’Twould be wiser if you would trust me and dismiss Mr. Curtis from your company. Believe me, I know what I’m saying. Bob will bear me out that the man is a —— scoundrel.”

Celia flushed. “You are indeed explicit,” she said coldly. Then suddenly she turned and laid her hand on his arm. “Tracy, Tracy, think shame of yourself for speaking so of a friend. You quarrel with Mr. Curtis, you insult him, and when he refuses to fight you for—for our sake—you dub him a scoundrel. Sure, Tracy dear, what’s come to you now?”

She lifted to him a sweetly pleading face, the mouth just dimpling into the suggestion of a smile of mischievous triumph, and she murmured coaxingly:

“Tracy, be good to me. Settle your difference with Mr.

Curtis for my sake, and thank him for a patience with your madness that does him honour.”

Tracy stared at her for a moment helplessly. Then he sprang to his feet and crossed to Lord Robert.

“Good lack, Bob!” he said desperately; “what’s to be done?”

Lord Robert looked across at her with a great tenderness in his eyes. “You must tell her the truth,” he said. “’Tis the most merciful.”

Tracy stood and stared out of the window with his back to his sister-in-law.

“Celia,” he said shortly, “Mr. Curtis has been bribed by the Ministry to spy upon the Jacobites here in Bath; you know there are many of that opinion among us. He has gained their confidence and learned their plans under the guise of friendship, and he has stolen—from a woman—the private papers dealing with the affair. This has been proved. Was I wrong in calling him a villain?”

There was a moment’s dead silence in the room. Then Celia rose and crossed to Tracy’s side.

“It is a lie!” she said hotly. “I’ll not believe it.”

He took her hand. “So I thought when I first learned it,” he said gently. “But it is true. He has himself admitted it.”

Her lips faltered. She turned to Lord Robert.

“And you, my lord,” she cried, “do you believe it?”

“I’d give my life if I could doubt it, madam,” he answered gently. And in his heart, as he looked at her face, he vowed that Timothy Curtis should pay for this hour, though it cost him his all to exact the price.

She pressed her hands together desperately and looked from one to the other; her face was very white.

"You say he has admitted it? And it is proved? But how comes it," she cried—"if this be so, how comes it that he still lives?"

"Because he has refused to fight," said Tracy sharply.

"You—you challenged him for this?"

"But he will not meet me. He prefers to go branded with the name of thief."

"Tracy, you are sure—sure?" she pleaded.

He nodded. "He was my friend," he said simply.

For a moment she stood with face averted, and to the two men watching her the silence was horrible. Then she drew herself up proudly and turned to her brother-in-law with a pathetic little smile.

"I am sorry, Tracy," she said humbly, "that I mistrusted you. You were right. And I thank you and Lord Robert for your care of my honour. In future I will try to be guided by you in my choice of acquaintances."

She paused, then continued lightly: "You promised to take us to the concert dinner at the Assembly Rooms to-day. I will go and change my gown." She smiled at him again reassuringly and went quickly out of the room.

Tracy looked after her with a sigh of relief, but Lord Robert shook his head.

"Demme, Tracy," he muttered miserably, "I feel as though I had killed her."

Alone in her room Celia stood long gazing out into the sunshine with unseeing eyes, while the tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"I deemed him the worthiest gentleman in the world," she whispered drearily, "and it seems he is a common spy. Ah! I am shamed—shamed that I should be so weak as to weep. I have dreamed indeed, and now I have awak-

ened. But I think I shall remember the dream all my days.”

Then she resolutely lifted her head and dried her eyes. She rang for her maid, and half an hour later she sallied forth to dinner with smiling eyes and laughing lips, bearing in her heart a dull, aching pain.

When Timothy reached the door of the ballroom that evening a minuet was in progress and he was forced to mingle with the little group gathered at the entrance till the music should cease and he could make his progress down the room.

As he waited, he became aware that he was the object of many curious glances, many whispered comments, and his eyes gleamed angrily as he read hostility in the faces about him. He put up his glass and returned the contemptuous looks of the men with a baffling smile of calm assurance, but in his heart he raged at their insolence and vowed another day should not pass before he called them to account. It seemed to him monstrous that they should presume to judge him for his refusal to allow an unwelcome fight to be forced upon him. The whispers of the women troubled him not a whit; he had never been wont to vex his soul with the fear of venomous tongues; and indeed he had eyes but for one woman and she had smiled upon him that morning in token of absolute trust.

At last the music ceased, the dancers stepped aside and the way lay clear for him to the top of the room, where he could dimly discern Celia, seated in a crowd of men.

It is not an easy task for a man to walk the length of a room, between rows of staring eyes, offering polite greetings which receive no acknowledgment and maintaining an unruffled calmness of demeanour. But Timothy was not

easily abashed. He strolled slowly between the ranks of the dancers swinging his glass, and bowing punctiliously to all his acquaintances, while the twitch of his lips and the twinkle in his eyes betrayed the fact that the humour of the scene was not lost upon him. When he reached the little group round Celia he placed a long strong hand on the shoulder of Sir Peter Pemberton, and drawing him good humouredly out of his way he stepped up to her side with an air of such confident assurance that the men around her could only gaze at him in mute indignation.

“Good-evening, Miss Winnington,” he said gaily. “You see I have come to claim the fulfilment of your promise.”

Celia looked up at him; her face crimsoned.

“I recollect no promise, Mr. Curtis,” she said stiffly. “And henceforth I shall be obliged if you will understand that I do not count you among my acquaintances.”

Timothy stared at her with a look of blank astonishment. Then he drew a step nearer and leaned over her entreatingly.

“Mistress Celia,” he pleaded softly, “what is it? Have I been so unfortunate as to offend you?”

Celia looked round upon the group of men.

“Gentlemen,” she said quietly, “I must beg of you to protect me from the insolence of this—person’s attentions.”

Timothy stepped back quickly and drew himself up. His face was very white.

“It will not be necessary, madam,” he said quietly. He gave a stiff little bow, and turning on his heel, marched down the room with head erect and lips pressed firmly together in a straight, hard line.

As he walked through the noisy, chattering groups a sudden silence fell upon them; they drew aside to leave his

way clear, and he passed out of the room as he had entered it—alone.

The violins struck up a lively country dance. Celia turned to the youthful Sir Peter.

“Shall we dance this?” she asked a little breathlessly.

He led her out with a smile of proud delight, and Celia, with shining eyes and smiling lips, danced, danced, danced the evening through in a vain effort to banish from her thoughts the picture of that figure with white, set face standing in lonely isolation before a thousand mocking eyes.

CHAPTER IX

“TRAPPED”

TIMOTHY CURTIS walked back to his lodgings with a hot pain in his breast. He had been publicly humiliated before all Bath, but that troubled him comparatively little; the pain for which he knew no remedy lay in the fact that Celia Winnington, the girl in whom he had looked to find his ideal of Womanhood, had changed to him inexplicably in the course of six hours.

“Some scandalous tongue has wagged about my name,” he argued desperately. “The affair of the duel has been misinterpreted to her. She believes me a scoundrel; it were unworthy of her did she let a scoundrel stay in her company. Ah! she is right.”

He mounted the stairs to his rooms with a slow heavy step and flung himself wearily back into his chair. Since the morning all his world had changed. Twelve hours ago he had been one of the most popular men in Bath, and the favoured suitor of the most adorable woman in England; now he was an outcast without a friend in the city, the object of open scorn and contempt, and all his dreams of love and happiness were shattered.

All this, it seemed, had come upon him simply because he refused to draw his pistol on a man who had been his staunchest friend. A sudden fury mastered him at the thought. By what right dared they condemn him, these men whom he had called his friends? He raged at their insolence. That at least should be remedied. He reached out his hand for his

rapier and drew the white blade carelessly through his fingers.

“They shall have their lesson,” he muttered; “and that no later than to-morrow. They question my right to refuse to meet Tracy? I’ll have them learn to respect my arm if they don’t respect my judgment. The insolents!”

The thought of action cheered his heart for a minute or two. He resolved to go down to the coffee-houses and taverns at the breakfast hour on the morrow, and there demand either public apology from the men who had scorned him or challenge them to prove their words. But he would need a friend to see him through the affair, and at that thought all his isolation came back to him with sudden force; he realised that in all the wide city of Bath he knew no man who would bear his messages.

A weary sense of loneliness oppressed him. His thoughts dwelt on Lord Westerby, his nearest relative; him, too, he had probably offended beyond hope of pardon, since he had turned aside from his journey to Bristol.

He mused upon that journey, upon the errand that prompted it. What was she like, he wondered, the woman who awaited him at Bristol. Was she kind? Was she gentle? Would she trust to him in defiance of the judgment of her world? If so, such love were surely something for a man whom all the world else held in contempt.

He shifted his chair and stared out into the night, where the slender crescent of the waning moon trailed her white skirts over the house-roofs. Romance had indeed led him far afield—not in the sunny bye-paths he had hoped for, but up the rugged steps of life. Should he follow her further along the untrodden ways, or should he turn his

back once and for all upon his dreams, and journeying at last to Bristol fulfil his uncle's will?

Far on into the night he sat, weighing his choice, while Reason warred against Desire, and Despair strove with the flicker of a dying Hope. At last, when the dead grey light of the morning pearly the eastern sky, he rose to his feet, the contest ended.

"I'm a fool," he muttered with a half-shamed laugh. "But faith! I'm proud of my folly. She bade me dare to dream. Shall I fear to do so even though my dream may know no fulfilment? By Heaven! no!"

He drew out from his inner pocket the bracelet she had given him and pressed it to his lips.

"I have vowed to her my service, and God helping me, I'll never stake my homage at any lesser shrine."

So he resolved with a half-amused smile at his sentiment.

Then he laid his plans. He decided to ride out the following evening to Farleigh, a few miles along the London Road, and take up his quarters at the sign of the "Horse and Hound." So he would be sufficiently near to fulfil his engagements with his enemies and communicate with Adelaide Wimbourne, yet far enough from Bath to avoid any chance of annoying Celia by his presence.

So he resolved; but first there must be some sword-play. His eyes gleamed, his heart beat gladly at the thought.

When Timothy left his lodgings, a figure emerged from the shadow of the houses opposite and followed him at a distance of a hundred yards down the street. He was a tall cadaverous creature, arrayed in the tattered finery characteristic of the many led-captains and broken men who clung to the outskirts of Bath society and picked up a precarious living by the performance of such useful but

questionable deeds as were deemed too unclean for the fingers of a gentleman. He walked with a pathetic attempt at a swagger, the last relic of bygone prosperity, and clattered his sword on the pavement with a ruffling air.

Captain Owen watched Timothy down to the entrance to Simpson's, then took up his station by a book-stall at the corner of the Grove, and under pretence of examining the prints and political squibs there displayed awaited the re-appearance of the man he shadowed.

Simpson's Rooms were crowded at that hour. Timothy paused at the door and looked round the room. At a table at the further side sat Marcus Ormonde, Charles Rathborne and Lord Stavely at breakfast, while Sir Peter Pemberton sat astride a chair behind them and read aloud extracts from the morning newsletter for their edification. Timothy slowly crossed the room and seated himself at the table beside them.

“Good-morning, Ormonde,” he said coolly; “what's the latest from town?”

Sir Marcus laid down his knife and fork and looked at him a moment with a curious expression in his eyes. Then he turned his shoulder on the intruder and went on with his breakfast. Timothy leaned across and tapped him on the shoulder.

“I fear, Sir Marcus,” he said quietly, “you are growing a trifle deaf. 'Tis an infirmity that is apt to lead to misunderstandings. You would do well to seek advice on the matter. I asked you the latest from town.”

Marcus slowly poured out his coffee. “The latest from town, Mr. Curtis, is that: ‘Pistols are demmed risky,’ and a man who has respect for his skin will do wisely to have small respect for his honour.”

Timothy put up his glass. "Sir Marcus, I find your news plaguy insolent," he said softly. "I shall be obliged if you will afford me an opportunity to teach you a better interpretation."

"He who fights and runs away, will live to run another day," hummed Marcus. "I shall give you no such opportunity, Mr. Curtis. I am one with Sir Tracy Wimbourne in disliking to have my arrangements upset at the eleventh hour."

Timothy flushed. "Do I understand that you will not give me satisfaction?" he asked.

"Your understanding is not at fault, sir," said Marcus, lifting his cup.

Timothy stretched out a long strong hand and laid it firmly on his arm. "If you cannot give me an explanation for your refusal, sir," he said coolly, "I shall be most reluctantly obliged to force a fight upon you."

Marcus made a vain effort to lift his arm or to put down his cup. "Mr. Curtis, you are delaying my breakfast," he said plaintively.

"With the utmost regret, I assure you," said Timothy politely. "But I await your explanation."

With a gesture of irritation Marcus turned and faced him.

"If I must be explicit, sir," it is because I decline to cross swords with a spy."

Timothy gave a jump that sent the coffee splashing over the table-cloth. He released Marcus's arm and drew back.

"I don't understand your meaning, sir, but 'twould seem it's demmed insolent," he said sharply. "A man who won't fight should have more care of his words. I fear I shall be put to the unpleasant necessity of waiting upon you with a horsewhip."

Marcus's eyes gleamed. He rose to his feet and picked up his hat. "Mr. Curtis, when you restore the papers you have stolen, and resign your present—er—remunerative position under Lord Pelham, I will be willing to give you the satisfaction you demand. Until then, I shall neither talk with you nor fight with you, and any attempt upon your part to force me to do either shall be dealt with by my grooms." He threw a coin to the waiter and strode out of the room.

For a moment it looked as though Timothy would follow him and force him to an encounter; but he restrained his temper with difficulty and turned to the other men at the table.

"By Gad!" he cried huskily. "Some one shall answer for this. Who is the author of this damned lie?"

"The gentleman to whom we owe our knowledge of your occupation is Sir Tracy Wimbourne," said Rathborne.

Tim was staggered. "Tracy!" So that is the meaning in his madness! "Tracy!" he paused a moment in thought. Then he looked round the ring of attentive faces and smiled at them mockingly: "It seems, gentlemen, my first affair must be with Sir Tracy Wimbourne. When I have dealt with him I shall be at liberty to receive your apologies."

He cocked his hat on one side and strolled out of the room with the satisfied smile of a man who sees his way clear before him.

Charles Rathborne stared after his retreating figure. "Demme!" he muttered, "if I don't think the man is innocent."

But Timothy when he had passed out into the street paused and stared about him doubtfully. He had ceased to smile, his path was not so clear as he had believed; on a sudden he remembered the promise he had given to Adelaide.

"Plague take the woman!" he muttered; "I must fight Tracy unless he withdraws this crazy charge. I'll give him ten days to heal his leg and then I will meet him with the rapier. I take it I can be sure of exacting satisfaction with that without risk to his life. That should satisfy Lady Adelaide. Now to find a man to carry my message."

He turned and walked slowly up the street. Captain Owen, waiting patiently by the book-stall, pinned his attention upon the print he was perusing and endeavoured to appear oblivious to all passers-by. Suddenly Timothy darted across the road and tapped him on the shoulder. The man leaped a good yard and turned a guilty face to his accoster.

"Good-morning," said Timothy cheerfully. "Captain Owen, I believe. I am Timothy Curtis, at your service. Will you do me the favour, sir, to carry a message for me?"

The man stared at him foolishly. "A—a message?" he stammered.

"Yes," answered Tim impatiently. "Such a message as it is not customary for a gentleman to carry for himself. You take me?"

A look of relief came over the man's face, a hint of cunning into his eyes. "I'm always delighted to oblige a gentleman in these affairs," he said. "To whom am I to carry your message, Mr. Curtis?"

"To Sir Tracy Wimbourne."

"Sir Tracy Wimbourne!" Again the man's surprise betrayed itself.

"Yes," said Tim impatiently. "You've heard of him?"

"S blood I have," said the captain thoughtfully. "And the nature of the message is——?"

"A challenge. If you will be good enough to accompany

me to my lodgings I will write a note for you to deliver; and I shall be obliged if you will undertake the affair for me.”

A sudden look of suspicion crossed the man’s face.

“And in the meantime?” he said slowly. “What will you do?”

“In the meantime I shall ride out to the ‘Horse and Hound’ at Farleigh and there await you. If you will be good enough to ride out after me—at my expense—we can dine there together this evening.”

The look of suspicion deepened. “Why do you leave Bath?” he asked sharply.

Timothy stared at him haughtily. “For my own pleasure, sir.”

The captain hesitated. Then he laid a somewhat grimy hand on Tim’s sleeve. “Look you, Mr. Curtis,” he said, “this is a d—— foul world and a man has scurvy tricks played upon him. You will require two friends in this affair. Mr. Tricket, an acquaintance of mine, shall carry your message to Sir Tracy and bring us the answer to-morrow. Meanwhile, I will ride out with you to Farleigh to-night, and be in readiness to serve you.”

For a moment Timothy stared at the man in haughty indignation, then he threw back his head and broke into a shout of laughter.

“Egad! captain,” he said admiringly. “You’re plaguy determined not to let the dinner slip through your fingers. Well, have it your own way. So Sir Tracy has my message I care nothing who delivers it.”

So the matter was settled. Captain Owen despatched an urchin in search of his friend Mr. Tricket, and accompanied Timothy back to his lodgings. Within an hour the

note was intrusted to the hand of the brisk, talkative little man who had answered the captain's summons, and Timothy and his companion were ready to take the road.

Mr. Tricket watched them depart from the shelter of an ale-house window. He gazed on Captain Owen's pale face and long figure admiringly. "D——! it," he muttered; "he's a cunning one. Caught and cooked him already and a dinner into the bargain!" Then he slowly tore the note to Sir Tracy into tiny fragments, and betook himself to Lord Stavely's lodgings at the Christopher Inn.

As they rode out of the narrow streets of the city and into the wide sunny country beyond, Timothy's heart beat high with happiness. He looked back upon his depression of the previous evening with wonder. For he had found at last the key to the riddle: It was surely none other than this rumour of "spy" that had reached the ears of Celia Winton and caused the inexplicable change in her behaviour toward him. He was glad to think that it was so.

"'Twould have been unworthy of her to treat me other than she did," he mused, "believing what she did. And it is but natural she should take Tracy's word. As for Tracy—demme! he's clean crazed."

It seemed a very small matter, now that he knew the accusation, to clear his character in the eyes of Celia. He was resolute not to force himself again upon her company: he would appeal to Adelaide Wimbourne to help him. The future was bright; he broke into merry snatches of song as he rode, and chaffed his companion upon his silence.

They reached their destination about two o'clock. The inn was an old Tudor house with a red-tiled courtyard and a rambling stone building behind surmounted by a high

wooden turret. It was situated about a quarter of a mile from the village, and set back a little from the highroad.

They dined comfortably, and later settled down to Picquet to wile away the tedious hours of the evening. Timothy was puzzled by his companion's moroseness. He had expected the wine would loosen his tongue. On the contrary, he was surprisingly abstemious; but when Timothy saw the glow in his eyes and the caress of his hands on the slips of pasteboard, he understood to what the man owed his fall.

They had been the sole guests at the inn for dinner, but about nine o'clock they heard the sound of arrivals in the courtyard. The newcomers, however, apparently went straight to their rooms, for they saw nothing of them.

About ten o'clock a servant entered with a note for Timothy. A man had left it at the door and departed without waiting for an answer.

Timothy took it with a muttered explanation of surprise, and broke the seal. It was written on fine, delicately scented paper, ornamented in one corner with a large green wafer representing a "W" inscribed in a circle of leaves.

The writing was brief:

"Mr. Curtis, you are in danger. There is a plot afoot to injure you. You will do well to be wary o' nights."

That was all; it was without signature and written in a feminine hand-writing, not too well formed, and possibly disguised.

Timothy looked up quickly and found Captain Owen's eyes fixed on him inquisitively. He grew suddenly weary of this watchfulness.

"I'm for bed," he said shortly, throwing down his cards. "You've seen to our rooms, eh?"

Captain Owen nodded; rising briskly he called for candles, and led the way upstairs. They parted on the landing with a nod and Timothy went straight to his room. But Captain Owen blew out his candle and ensconced himself in the shadow between two high presses, from which he could watch the door of the other's lodging.

Timothy took a cursory survey of his apartment. It was a fair-sized room with two doors, the one by which he had entered from the main landing, and another, he discovered, opening into a narrow passage, at the end of which rose the ladder-like stairway leading to the turret. Neither door boasted lock or bolt; he uttered an oath of annoyance at that discovery, but tilted a stout chair against either handle and felt secure from any unexpected entrance. Then he drew out the scented note and re-perused it.

The warning did not surprise him. The point of interest to him lay in the question as to who had sent it.

For a little time he had thought of Celia Winnington, and his heart leaped with a delicious hope. But he knew it was unlikely; hers was not the nature to stoop to any concealment. She would not have disguised her writing, nor would she have omitted to sign her name. It was more probably the work of Adelaide Wimbourne. When he had decided this fact, his interest in the note vanished; he tossed it into his saddle-bags and prepared himself for bed.

With a recollection of the warning, he tested the doors again, then assured that none could enter without his knowledge, he placed sword and pistol on the table beside the bed, blew out his candle, and in five minutes was fast asleep.

He was awakened suddenly by a loud crash, but whether the sound came from near or far he could not determine. Quickly he put out his hand to reach the tinder-box on the table beside him and his heart gave a sudden great jump of fear—for the table was empty, sword, pistol, and light had gone!

Timothy sat still and listened. All was silent. Then he drew himself higher up in bed and groped about in vain search for some sort of weapon with which to defend himself. He could find nothing save the iron candle stick, but in lieu of better weapon, he gripped it firmly and waited.

There was no sound, but suddenly the grey blur was partially darkened by moving shapes—something was entering the room.

Timothy was out of bed in an instant and stood crouching against the wall in the darkness, candle stick in hand. He dared not speak for fear of betraying his position, but his movements had been heard. The moving figures stopped suddenly and he heard a voice mutter: “D—— the fellow! He’s awake!”

In reality only a few seconds, it seemed to Timothy an eternity while he stood waiting in the darkness, staring in the direction of the doorway, and listening to every creak. Then a low mocking laugh broke the stillness, and Rory Winnington’s well-known drawling voice muttered impatiently:

“Get on, you fools. Are you afraid of an unarmed man? Bring a light.”

There was a shuffle of footsteps, the scraping of a flint, a spark, and then the steady light of a lamp illumined the room and Timothy found himself facing four men, their

swords in their hands and their eyes fixed on him in blank astonishment.

Timothy conceived on a sudden a great contempt for his candle stick; he flung it down and grasped the leg of the little table.

"It's no use, Curtis," said Charles Rathborne, the foremost man. "We've trapped you."

Timothy edged along the wall, table in hand.

"What d'ye want?" he snapped. He was thinking quickly. He had worked his way along the wall to the second door and stood now beside it, his eyes fixed on his opponents.

"Don't be a fool, man," urged Rathborne. "We don't want to hurt you."

For answer Tim suddenly kicked the chair away from the door, wrenched it open and jumped back into the passage outside, pulling it to behind him.

There was a sharp sound at his elbow. He wheeled round, swinging his table. He saw the slither of a blade in a ray of light from a passage window, a second later he felt a sharp prick in his shoulder.

He ran backwards along the passage holding the table before him. His foot touched the lowest step of the turret ladder. He bounded up it as his door was wrenched open and the four men ran out with the light. The ladder was short and steep. He had hoped to find a second exit from the turret, but when he reached the wooden platform at the top of the steps he found he was shut in by round wooden walls, pierced only by four tiny windows. There was no escape.

He stood at the top of the ladder grasping the table, and peered down at the men below him. Roger Lee was the foremost now, his face crimson with rage; he stood half way up

the ladder, sword in hand, vainly endeavouring to lunge at him past the protecting table. The other men crowded at the foot, staring up at them.

Timothy laughed suddenly. “I’ve the advantage of you, gentlemen,” he cried gaily. “You’ll not deny I’ve the advantage.”

Lord Stavely seized Lee’s shoulders and pulled him roughly back. “That’s no use,” he said shortly. “Rush the fellow.”

He dropped his sword and made a grasp at the table. Tim laughed again. He drew back for a second and then rushed down on the men below him with all his weight. He struck Stavely fairly with the centre of the table and sent him hurling back into the arms of the others. Then he stood half way down the steps, and peered at them over the edge of his extemporised shield.

“Rush me, would you?” he chuckled. “Try again.”

A sudden sharp blow struck his ankles behind through the open back of the steps, his feet shot out before him, he fell heavily on his back and he and the table slithered together down the stairs.

He clutched wildly at the rail, he made a desperate effort to rise, but they were on him in a moment. He fought with fists and feet, but was helpless in their grasp. He had a confused vision of Captain Owen emerging triumphantly from behind the stairway waving a long broom; he saw a sword flash and heard a voice—Rory’s he thought—cry sharply: “Don’t murder the fool.” Then he felt a sharp blow on the head and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER X

“AT CHARITY FARM”

WHEN Timothy Curtis came to himself he was lying on the settle in what appeared to be the inner kitchen of a rough farm house. It was morning, and the bright sunshine streamed in through the windows.

Timothy sat up and stared about him. His head ached and his body felt stiff and bruised; a numb sensation about his legs drew his glance in that direction. He found his ankles were tightly bound with cord. His wrists were unfettered, but one arm was fastened to his side in a rough sling. He put up his hand and found his head was bandaged; there were blood stains on the sleeve of his shirt.

Slowly a recollection of the events of the previous evening returned to him. He recalled the fight on the stairway, the faces of the men who had trapped him, he knew in whose hands his fate lay. But as to where he was or what was to befall him he could form no conjecture.

There were sounds in the room, the clatter of cups and knives, some one was breakfasting at a table behind the settle. He stooped and tugged at the thongs that bound his ankles, but could not loose them with one hand. He gave up the attempt, struggled awkwardly to his feet and dragged himself round the end of the seat.

At the table in the window three men sat at breakfast, their backs toward him. They wore their swords and their pistols lay on the table beside them. Timothy recognised

three of his opponents of the previous evening and his eyes gleamed angrily.

“Good-morning,” he said sharply.

The men wheeled in their chairs and stared at him.

“Gad!” exclaimed Roger Lee; “he’s cheated the devil, after all.”

Tim hopped awkwardly to the table.

“Give me something to drink,” he said curtly; “and demme! take these cursed things off my legs; I can’t run away yet.”

After a second’s hesitation, Charles Rathborne stooped and cut the thongs that bound his ankles, and Timothy staggered to a chair grimacing with pain as the blood rushed back to his benumbed limbs. Roger Lee poured out a cup of strong coffee and pushed it across the table toward him; he drank greedily and put down the cup with a sigh of satisfaction.

“Now,” he drawled softly, “I’ll be obliged if you’ll tell me what’s the meaning of all this.”

Lee filled up his cup again. “You know well enough,” he said shortly.

“Know! Demme, if I do. I suppose ’tis concerned with this cock-and-bull story of espionage Tracy Wimbourne has devised, but hang me if I understand what you’re up to now.”

Lord Stavely shrugged his shoulders. “This affectation of ignorance is wearisome, Mr. Curtis,” he said stiffly. “We’ve a little affair on hand in which we do not wish your—er—connivance. You’ve been proved a spy, and if you had your deserts you should hang from yonder beam. You are fortunate that we choose another way to silence you. We purpose to keep you close until the affair is ended and then

hand you over to the judgment of the one whom you have most injured."

"Keep me close? Where?"

"Here—until to-night. Hereafter in the Scots Theological College in Paris. You have the choice whether you will journey there in comfort as a gentleman 'on parole'; or in—er—considerable discomfort as a prisoner."

Tim did not hesitate long; whatever the discomfort, he had no mind to go tamely to prison. He did not calculate his chance of escape was great, but he was resolved to make the most of it.

"I'll give you no parole," he said coolly. "Truth to tell, gentlemen, I'm interested to see how you take me there. We'll have an eventful journey, I'm thinking."

Stavely looked across at Lee. "That means three of us."

"Three!" cried Tim indignantly; "faith, sir, you underestimate me!"

The door opened suddenly and a sturdy six-foot farmer entered. Tim sprang toward him quickly, then fell back with a disappointed air. "Ah!" he said; "member of your company, I see— Then I'll not trouble him."

The farmer grinned. He crossed to Stavely and said something softly.

"What? It's time to cage him, eh?" asked Lee.

"Safer, sir," answered the farmer. "We're known pretty well hereabouts and not troubled much with visitors, but on a farm you never can be sure. And at times the ladies and gentlemen from Bath call here for a glass of milk when they ride on the down."

Tim pricked up his ears. He had hitherto had no glimmering of an idea where he was; the windows looked on to a courtyard beyond which was a thick wood. But from the

man's words it seemed he was not many miles from the city, possibly at one of the farms on the hill behind Claverton Down.

Rathborne touched him on the shoulder.

“If you refuse your parole, Curtis, you must be prepared for—forcible measures,” he said warningly. “We run no risks.”

Tim nodded, “I take you, Charlie. Were I in your case, I'd be plaguy prudent.”

Rathborne walked round the settle to the side of the open hearth. He touched a spring concealed behind one of the hearthstones and the wainscot by the fireplace sprang apart revealing a narrow aperture about two inches wide. He inserted his fingers, and with a slight jerk pulled back the panelling until the gap was wide enough to admit of a man. A large cavity was revealed, evidently an old hiding hole, dimly lighted by a small window opening into the chimney about eight feet up. The place was large, extending all round the back of the chimney, but it was almost filled with strong wooden cases and neatly stacked bundles of arms.

Timothy eyed the place queerly and hesitated. Then he shook his head: “I'll give you no parole,” he repeated. “I'll escape you yet.”

“Tie him up then,” said Lee shortly.

Timothy grimaced sourly as they bound him hand and foot, but he made no useless attempt at resistance. Only when they produced a gag did he raise objection.

“Plague take it, that's too much!” he muttered. “Charlie, I'll give you my word of honour, I'll not speak or shout or make any sign while I'm in there, but hang me, if I'll endure being gagged for six mortal hours.”

“Don't trust him,” said Stavely quickly.

Tim's eyes gleamed savagely. He turned to Rathborne and looked him in the face. "My word, Charlie," he said quietly.

Rathborne nodded. "I will take it. I go surety for him."

No further objection was raised. Tim was lifted into the hiding hole and the wainscot shot back upon him.

He sat down on one of the cases with a whimsical shrug of resignation and prepared to endure as patiently as might be his weary hours of captivity. He could hear the conversation on the other side of the wainscot and gathered that Stavely and Lee purposed riding to Bath to report, while Rathborne was to remain on guard at the farm. Presently the voices were silenced, and he conjectured that the men had left the room.

The time dragged on. His wounded shoulder smarted, his wrists and ankles ached. He shifted his seat restlessly.

"I'd give my ears to have ten minutes' conversation with Tracy now," he muttered savagely.

Suddenly he sat upright and listened eagerly. People had entered the room and were drawing near his hiding place.

Then a low, well-known voice broke the stillness and his heart leaped with a sudden amazed delight. Celia Winnington was close to the fireplace, separated from him only by the thin wall of wainscot.

It was evident from the sound that she was sitting on the settle; she spoke with little breathless gasps of laughter as though she had been running.

"Lud, Sir Peter, what a storm of rain! Who would have expected it when we set out. Whither did the others ride?"

"I don't know, madam," answered Peter Pemberton. "When the storm broke I seized your rein and dashed for the nearest shelter."

“And bundled me off my horse on the other side of the wood and made me run for it,” laughed Celia. “A monstrous gallant proceeding, I vow.”

“But, madam, ’twas the simplest way. The wood is too thick for the horses and ’twas a long ride round to the road,” argued Sir Peter anxiously.

“Well, I forgive you. But do you go back now and bring the poor beasts into shelter.”

“And leave you alone, madam?”

“Faith! what else? I presume this is no ogre’s hole. Where are we?”

“Charity Farm—belongs to the three Dawson brothers, of whom, no doubt, you’ve heard.”

“Not I,” laughed Celia. “Who are they?”

“Corinthians, madam—the finest prize fighters in the country, when they were younger. It’s rumoured their neighbours find them surly, but they are deemed hospitable to sports, and half the—er—the affairs of honour in Bath take place on their land.”

Celia laughed softly. “Faith, Sir Peter, you’re full of gossip. I vow I would love to meet our hosts, but it seems they are afield to-day. And now, for pity’s sake go and bring in the poor horses and see them stabled; I shall not stir from here till the rain ceases.”

“At your bidding, madam. I’ll be back anon. Why, Rathborne—what brings you here?”

Rathborne had entered quickly and stopped with a sharp exclamation of astonishment at the sight of Celia.

“Miss Winnington! You here?”

“Storm bound, Sir Charles,” laughed Celia. “Are you in the same plight?”

“An affair?” asked Peter, with a knowing wink. “Yes,

yes, Miss Winnington; I will not delay. 'Tis lucky Rathborne's here, to bear you company till I return."

Sir Peter departed noisily. There was a sudden silence in the room. Tim muttered impatiently under his breath; it maddened him to know Celia so near and to be obliged in honour not to reveal his presence. The silence irked him; he pined to know what was passing in glances between the two in the room.

Rathborne crossed over to Celia's side; his face was white and his eyes eager. It seemed he had entirely forgotten Tim's presence behind the wainscot, forgotten all save the sudden unexpected joy of finding himself alone with the woman he adored.

"Miss Winnington," he said simply, "some might judge this time inopportune and my bluntness ungallant—if it be so, I crave your forgiveness. But it seems to me that if a man's whole heart is full of one thought, it matters little what time or manner he chooses for imparting it. By the kindness of Heaven I find you here alone, let me take Heaven's gift and tell you my thought."

Celia rose quickly to her feet.

"Sir Charles," she pleaded gently, holding out her hand, "is it not written 'Silence is golden'?"

"No, madam," he answered quickly. "Let me speak; 'tis kinder. Ah! I love you so. Since that day I first saw you driving into Bath I have known nothing clearly save that I love you. Is there no hope for me—Celia?"

Celia laid her hand gently on his arm, there were tears of pity in her eyes. "Sir Charles," she said sadly, "I am a most unhappy girl. For you offer me that which a woman should be proud to accept and yet humble in accepting—but I cannot take your gift."

“You cannot madam? Ah! but I ask so little in return. Who am I to dream that I can win all your heart? I will be content with the right to try to win it.”

She hesitated, then she shook her head.

“No,” she whispered; “no, it is impossible. I cannot take all and give nothing in return.”

“And you have nothing to give me?” he pleaded—“nothing?”

She lifted her eyes to his. “Nothing, save this: that all my life through I shall go the gladlier for the memory of the love you have offered me to-day.”

He stooped and kissed her hand. “It should be enough,” he said softly; “but, ah! madam, hope dies hard. Is—I have no right to ask it—but is your heart already given?”

She turned away and stood a moment silent. “I do not know,” she said slowly, “I do not know. Yet if it be possible for a woman to love where she loathes, to hold sweet what it shames her to remember, then—Heaven pity me—it is.”

Charles Rathborne stared at her a moment doubtfully. Then he clenched his fists in sudden enlightenment.

“He is not worthy of you, madam,” he said hotly.

She lifted her hand to stay his anger. “I know it, sir,” she said proudly. “And you may rest assured that, knowing it, I had rather live all my life through unloved, unhonoured, than suffer that man to soil so much as the edge of my robe by the pollution of his touch.”

A sudden light of hope gleamed in his eyes. “Madam,” he pleaded, “this being so, will you not give me the right to protect you——”

“Against myself?” she interrupted, with a little bitter smile. “Ah! not to-day, not to-day—indeed you must not press me more to-day, sir; I cannot bear it.”

“Madam, I have been thoughtless,” he cried in quick contrition. “But it is easier for a man to see his way with only a glimmer of hope than in the darkness of despair. Forgive me. I will leave you now and we will speak of this later.”

Kissing her hand again he turned and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Celia stood a moment motionless, then with a long shivering sigh of utter weariness she leaned her arms on the high chimney piece, bowed her head and broke into bitter weeping.

“Ah!” she whispered; “I love him, I love him—and the shame of it will kill me.”

Timothy, standing a yard away from her inside the wainscot, drew in his breath with a sharp sigh of pain when her sobs broke the stillness, and ground his teeth savagely at the impotence of his position. He had had no choice save to listen to every word of her conversation with Rathborne, and truth to tell, he had not been sorry for the necessity that forced him to overhear it. He winced horribly at the scorn in her voice when she spoke of his unworthiness, but there was sweetness in the bitter, for now he knew that she loved him, could he but prove to her his innocence.

But when the helpless sobs continued so near him, a sudden savage fury seized him. His honour bound him to give no word or sign that he was there, but no vow held him from making his escape therefrom could he contrive it. In desperation he strained at his bonds till his sinews cracked and the blood started afresh from the wound in his shoulder. He stooped and gnawed savagely at the cords that held him; blindly he felt with his fettered hands for a chink in the wooden wall.

And then suddenly, whether some unconscious movement of hers touched the spring, or whether it had never been securely locked and his groping fingers caught in the panel, the catch gave and the wainscot slowly opened the width of two inches.

Celia heard the click of the latch and lifted her head; she gave a little gasp of surprise at sight of the opening. The curiosity mastered her; she inserted her fingers into the aperture and jerked at the panel. It slipped back and she found herself suddenly face to face with Timothy Curtis.

She started back with a little cry of terror and stood gazing at him in wide-eyed amazement. Timothy was purple with his exertions, but he in no wise lost his wits; he hurled himself out of the opening, staggered, steadied himself against the settle and stood upright, bound still hand and foot, but free from his prison and close to Celia's side.

For one long moment they looked into each other's eyes silently; then Celia turned away and walked slowly toward the door.

Timothy gave a little cry of pain. “Madam!” he pleaded desperately. “Surely women should be merciful?”

Slowly, unwillingly she turned again and faced him.

“Should women show pity to a traitor?” she asked.

“Rather pity than condemn him unheard,” he answered quickly.

She started, then very slowly she drew a few steps nearer.

“Have you any excuse?” she asked, then she shook her head quickly. “No—no—there is, there can be no justification for treachery.”

“Yet in justice you will listen to me, madam, he said firmly.

She did not answer, but she went a few steps nearer to him, drawn by his glance, and stood waiting for him to speak.

"You have been told, madam," he said slowly, "that I am the blackest-hearted traitor that ever played the Judas to his friends. But will you tell me why you have believed it?"

She started. "Why, sir? Because I have been told by one whose truth and loyalty I have no right to doubt."

"And what right have you to doubt mine?"

She looked at him with a long searching glance. "Ah! how can I know the truth?" she cried. "Tracy loved you, but he believes you guilty—all the world believes it."

"But you, madam, in your heart do not believe it."

She stood silent. Timothy strained impatiently at his bonds. For the first time in his life he realised the advantages of gesture. It is indeed difficult for a man to plead his case when he can neither move a step nor lift a hand.

"Listen, madam," he continued desperately. "There may be men who could spy upon their friends and find justification for the act in their own hands—I do not know, the world holds many kinds of men, and none of us, I warrant, bear no stain upon our shields. But can you believe that any man could talk with you as we have talked together, could love you as I love you, and yet could hide in his heart such base treachery? Surely, madam, God Himself would rather strike him dead."

She lifted to him a face full of doubt and distress, clasping her white hands in the eager little gesture he knew so well.

"Ah! it is so difficult for me to judge the right," she cried. "We women are so easily deceived, and how could Tracy be so mistaken? Do you not see how hard it is for me?"

His eyes softened at sight of her distress.

“Madam, I wouldn’t presume to blame you,” he said quickly. “Who am I that I should dare to count upon your faith? But—your belief in my honour is life or death to me. Were I but free I could track this lie to its source, and lay hands upon the real spy. But now, plague take it, I’m trapped, trapped, and helpless to clear myself.”

“Ah! yes,” she said slowly; “you are a prisoner. Are they—are they going to kill you?”

“What do I care what they do,” he muttered miserably, “if I cannot win your belief?”

She looked once more into his eyes, then turned and picked up Rathborne’s sword, which lay on the table. Crossing to his side she cut the ropes that bound his hands and feet.

“You are free,” she said simply.

He stretched out his arms with a cry of joy. “Ah! you believe in me, madam?”

“No,” she said slowly; “not yet. I—I dare not. But prove your innocence—find the spy of whom Tracy has been warned, and I will beg your forgiveness for a cowardice my weakness cannot help.”

“Forgiveness!” he laughed softly; “I would not have your trust on any easier terms. But I too would ask of you one little thing,” he continued wistfully. “Ah! madam, don’t again beg others to protect you from me—for indeed you may rest confident I will not trouble you until I can prove my right to do so. Do not fear me, madam.”

She flushed and dropped her eyes before his glance.

“I do not fear you,” she said quietly.

He took the sword from her and drew the blade lovingly through his fingers. “Now I’m myself again,” he cried joyously. “Never fear, madam, I will prove worthy of

your trust. Now—will you tell me the points of Tracy's—accusation."

She hesitated. "I do not know the story in full, sir, and Adelaide will not speak of it. But it seems Tracy believes you to have accepted Lord Pelham's bribe; and further, certain secret papers which Adelaide was carrying for Tracy to be delivered in Bath were stolen that night we rested at the inn, and Adelaide says you must have taken them, as none but you knew they were in her possession."

"Lady Wimbourne says that?" he cried in amaze.

Suddenly her eyes widened with fear. "Hush!" she said; "some one is coming!"

Sir Peter's voice sounded in the outer room.

"They must not know you have freed me," cried Tim. He tucked the sword under his arm, picked up the ropes, and springing back into his hiding place shut the wainscot behind him just as Sir Peter entered the room.

"The rain has ceased, Miss Winnington, and the horses are here," cried Peter. "Where is Charles?"

"He left me some time since," answered Celia vaguely.

"The monstrous ungallant fellow," cried Peter indignantly. "But perhaps his affair would not wait. Shall we be stirring, madam?"

Timothy heard the sound of departure. Then Rathborne's voice echoed in the outer room, giving an order. He entered and crossing to the settle sat down with a sigh.

Timothy laid his plans quickly. He must effect his escape before the others returned, or he might find it impossible if, as he expected, their pistols were charged. He tapped lightly on the wainscot. "Charlie, Charlie," he whispered, "let me out." Rathborne sprang to his feet and opened the panel. In a second Tim was on him; they struggled

together. Rathborne was taken by surprise and for the moment Timothy, though the smaller man, had the advantage. He jerked up his sword to the other's throat. "Speak and you're a dead man," he whispered breathlessly.

For answer Rathborne smiled. "I'm your surety," he said. He opened his mouth and roared for help.

Timothy dropped his point. "You fool!" he said reproachfully. "Now I must run for it."

The door burst open, two enormous men appeared on the threshold. Timothy dashed for the open window and hurled himself across the little courtyard. The wall was high but roughly built, he was easily able to obtain foothold, and scrambled up, holding his sword between his teeth.

A pistol clicked and a bullet grazed his cheek; then a man rushed across the yard and seized his foot. But already he had his knee over the coping; he swung free his sword arm and lunged at his opponent. The man jumped back and Tim tumbled over into the wood on the other side.

He was on his feet in a second and ran through the wood gasping for breath and tripping over roots and stumps. Even when clear of the wood and out on the open downs he did not pause, so fearful was he of recapture. He ran on until he dropped down on to a stretch of the Bradford Road, luckily at the time empty of passers-by, and then at last he stopped, realising that, unless he would be accused of lunacy, he must moderate his pace and sober his appearance. He was without hat or coat, his shoulder and forehead were bleeding, and his sword was unsheathed in his hand.

He stepped down to a little stream in the meadow bordering the road, bathed his face, and succeeded in checking

the bleeding in his shoulder wound. Then, feeling a trifle more presentable, he walked back to the road.

A groom exercising two horses appeared, riding one and leading the other. Timothy stepped up to him and laid his hand upon the rein of the saddle-horse.

"Whose horses are these?" he asked coolly.

The man stared at him amazedly. Tim repeated his question.

"Sir Marcus Ormonde's," muttered the man, still staring.

Tim chuckled. "So? One of his grooms? Oblige me, my man, by dismounting and allowing me to ride back to Bath."

"I'll not. Let me go, d—— you!" cried the groom indignantly, trying to shake him off; but the led horse was restive, he could not free his rein.

"I think you will," said Timothy coolly, seizing his foot. "A whip is no match for a sword, and the road is no soft place to fall on."

With an oath the groom slipped to the ground and Timothy sprang to the saddle. "You'll find this horse at the stables by the east gate," he said. "But first go to Sir Marcus and tell him that Mr. Curtis has found his first encounter with the grooms monstrous opportune."

He dug his heels into the horse's flanks and galloped toward Bath, leaving the groom cursing in the road.

When he reached Bath, he overtook a heavy travelling coach just entering the city, and drew rein to allow it to pass through the gate. A woman, seated with her back to the horses, looked up at him curiously and their eyes met. She was very fair, with copper-coloured hair and strange eyes, the colour of burnt umber. It seemed to Timothy as he looked at her that the light of recognition dawned in her

face and she gave a little smile of greeting; but before he could be sure the coach passed on its way, and he rode on through devious streets to his lodging, puzzling his brains over her identity.

CHAPTER XI

“THE SEDAN CHAIRS”

TIMOTHY CURTIS kept his room for three days. The surgeon who dressed his wound advised it, and indeed Tim had little wish to oppose his directions. As he sat alone through the long day, racking his brains for one clear thread to guide him through the tangled skein of circumstances, there flashed again and again across his mind a dark suspicion. He dismissed it angrily, but still it returned, and each time with clearer, with more circumstantial, details. Was it not possible that the traitor, the thief of the papers, was Adelaide Wimbourne herself?

Such things had been. He knew well there are women who would stoop to any treachery to satisfy their desires, but that Tracy's wife was such an one he could not, he would not, believe.

And yet, he thought of her strange conduct on the road to Bath, her evident annoyance at his company ; of her mysterious midnight encounter with a stranger of which he had never yet been able to find satisfactory explanation. Other mysteries in her conduct flashed across his mind. Why had she sent him on a wild goose chase to Claverton Down the day of Tracy's return? What was she seeking in his room the night she visited him? Why had his letter asserting his innocence and challenging the accusation received no answer from Tracy? Had she intercepted it? One by one the points of evidence were amassed against her, and reluctantly he confessed that the evidence was strong. The

papers had been intrusted to her by her husband, she had given them to the stranger at Avington, either through fear or through love, and to shield herself, she had invented the tale of theft and woven a skilful chain of suspicion round himself.

So the story shaped itself in his mind. He recalled dimly the snatches of conversation he had overheard from his post behind the settle, vague whispers of papers, of loyalty, and those last stern words of farewell: "On your life, madam, watch." Surely, surely the proofs were strong. To be sure Tracy knew something of that scene in the inn parlour, for he had questioned him about it, but doubtless Adelaide had been beforehand with her version of her midnight wandering, lest it should reach the ear of her husband from another source.

The evidence seemed clear, and yet Timothy fought the belief with all his might. He had known Adelaide long, and though never actually one of her suitors, he had always believed her worthier than any woman to be the wife of his friend; and her devotion to Tracy had seemed the one object of her life. He could not believe her such a consummate hypocrite. But further, he shrank from belief in her guilt for another reason, for if she be indeed the spy he sought, how could he accuse her to Celia; and without that accusation how could he hope to prove his own innocence? His only chance lay in obtaining an interview with her, and then should he succeed in bringing home the charge, he must persuade her either by threats or by entreaties to clear him in Celia's eyes. The opinion of the rest of the world was to him of trifling consequence.

The thought of the interview was not cheering, he had a dread of scenes with women, he hoped it would not be neces-

sary to have recourse to threats. He could find it in his heart to pity her. It was obvious she had accused him merely to save herself from suspicion, and the warning she had sent him to the "Horse and Hounds" showed a genuine wish to spare him evil consequences. He cursed the fates for sending him to be the Nemesis of her guilt.

As he sat wiling away the hours by dealing and cutting the cards, hand against hand, he had yet a source of uneasy thought. His departure from Bath the previous day seemed to have awakened the suspicions of the tradespeople; on his return he found his table covered with unpleasant-looking accounts. The thought of these pressing creditors recalled to his mind the offer of Mr. Josiah Smith and the threats of the mayor of Bath, which, in the excitements of the past two days, he had forgotten. A faint curiosity with regard to the suspected house stirred him, and having nothing better to do, he dragged his chair into the embrasure of the window early on the second morning of his confinement, and set himself to watch the entries and exits at the bright brown doorway opposite.

It would seem the little French coiffeuse had a large clientele. Chair after chair was borne down the narrow alley and in at the demure brown doorway until at six o'clock the last visitor departed. Then she drew the curtains closely across her windows and emerged from the demure doorway, followed by an elderly serving woman. She locked the door behind her and tripped away along Boat-Stall Lane, and out of the eastern gate of the city.

The coiffeuse was a small middle-aged woman, betraying her nationality in every line of her neat figure, from the top of her elaborately dressed head to the tip of her well-shod feet. She still retained much of the beauty of youth,

though how much was due to powder and paint it was difficult at a distance to determine. She had bright black eyes, a full figure and full, red-lipped mouth, and walked with the short, quick steps of a busy, energetic woman. She nodded and smiled at many acquaintances as she passed down the lane, and paused at the gate to pat the head of the gateward's child before she turned along the London road to her home. After her departure the house remained silent and deserted until her return on the following morning.

Now when a man devotes himself for the space of two days to watching the comings and goings of a crowd, and when, moreover, his eyes are sharpened by suspicion, he is likely enough to alight upon many curious matters. So it was with Timothy.

At first this regular procession of sedan chairs, one on an average of every twenty minutes, appeared to him as innocent as it was uninteresting, but presently, as he watched, he noted certain remarkable facts that considerably sharpened his curiosity. He remarked, for example, that every chair which was open, which deposited its occupant in the roadway, or which was borne by liveried servants, came up Boat-Stall Lane from the direction of the city, but every chair which swung up the passage from Cock Alley was without exception closed and was carried directly into the house. He remarked again that the boots worn by the bearers of these latter chairs were smirched with heavy country clay and not, as might have been expected, with the mire of city gutters.

Again, he noted that the men bearing the chairs up Cock Alley sweated and toiled under the weight of their burdens with an effort unusual to chairmen, but when, after a decent interval allowed for coiffuring, they departed again

from the house, they swung down the passage with the light step and easy carriage that usually betokens an empty chair. Yet it was not possible that they could have left the fares behind them at the house, for none ever departed on foot.

But chiefly was Timothy's curiosity aroused by the remarkable likeness among the chairmen who came up Cock Alley. After studying them carefully for two days, it was clear to him that there were but four different sets of chairmen coming and going to the house from that direction. Now they were obviously hired chairs, therefore it was not unlikely that one chair should be frequently hired on the same job, but that the same four chairs should be hired in rotation with such unchanging regularity for two whole days struck him as such an extraordinary coincidence that he resolved not to allow another hour to elapse without inquiring further into the mystery.

Accordingly, his shoulder being now almost healed, he prepared to go out and investigate. He muffled himself in a high-collared riding-coat and wide-brimmed hat, and waiting until Madame Grieve had departed for the night, he plunged down into the narrow alley and knocked lustily at the bright brown door.

His summons met with no response. The knocking echoed against the high walls in the alley and died away in the distance. He stepped back and stared up at the house and knocked again, listening eagerly for any sound within; but all was quiet and deserted.

Suddenly, he stood arrested, staring with wide-open eyes at the little round window to the left of the doorway, shrouded in its white muslin curtains. For as he threw a last glance over his shoulder at the house, for a moment, for the frac-

tion of a second, the white curtains were parted, and a woman's face framed in an aureole of copper-coloured hair appeared in the opening. He caught one glimpse of a pair of bright eyes, the colour of burnt umber, and then the shadow of the curtain fell again across the window, and all was blank.

Timothy rubbed his eyes and looked again. The curtain hung motionless before the window, the house gave no sign of life. He knocked again, and waited. He knew he was not mistaken in the face, it was the same woman who had smiled at him from the coach window three days previously, but who she was and why she was here, lurking in an empty house, were questions it baffled him to answer. His curiosity in the mystery of the house redoubled.

But it was clear no more was forthcoming that evening. Reluctantly he left his post, and turning down into Cock Alley, he strolled thoughtfully in the direction of the High Street.

A man stepped out suddenly from a doorway and tapped him on the shoulder. Timothy wheeled round quickly, his hand on his sword; his nerves were jumpy. He found himself face to face with Mr. Josiah Smith.

“Good-evening, Mr. Curtis,” he said eagerly. “Did you see anything? I see you are watching the house.”

“How dare you play the spy on me, sirrah?” cried Tim angrily. “Do you honour me with your suspicions?”

Josiah gave a little apologetic bow and turned to walk beside him.

“It's the house, Mr. Curtis,” he said dolefully. “I watch day and night as well as it's possible. But though I've had my eye on it for a week, I can't see any sign of what I expected.”

Timothy checked an impulse to order the man away. It dawned upon him that Josiah Smith might prove a useful mine of information to be explored in his search for the spy. He eyed him thoughtfully.

“What roused your suspicions in the first instance?”

“A letter, sir, an anonymous letter expressly stating that this house sheltered a band of conspirators who hid their arms and ammunition in the upper rooms. But we’ve searched the house, we’ve watched it, and I’ve sent women at all hours under the pretence of wanting their hair dressed, and at no time have we seen anything out of the common or in anyway suspicious.”

“Ah-h!” said Tim thoughtfully; “it strikes me, man, the letter was a blind and you are on the wrong tack.”

Josiah shook his head. “I thought so myself, sir, and was for searching elsewhere, but last night—!” He stopped and eyed Timothy doubtfully; but he was evidently yearning to confide in some one, and after a moment’s hesitation he continued in a low voice: “Last night, sir, about eleven o’clock, I walked along here to have a quiet look, and as I reached that corner yonder, I looked up suddenly at the sky and I saw—a woman on the roof of that house.”

“Saw what?” cried Tim amazedly.

“A woman, sir. It was only for a moment, and the light was shifty, but I saw her as plain as I see you. She was in white, sir, with flames round her head. She stood there for a second, and then she vanished.”

“Vanished! Demme! Where?”

“Nowhere, sir. Disappeared. Sank away.”

“Pooh! A trap-door.”

“There is none, sir. The mayor sent a man up to examine the leads on the pretence that a broken chimney endangered

the street, and he says there is no way to the roof from the house.”

“Egad!” ejaculated Tim thoughtfully; “it strikes me, Mr. Smith, that your house is haunted.”

Josiah eyed him queerly and gave a nervous laugh.

“It—it is strange, isn’t it, sir?”

“Strange? It’s demmed uncanny.”

Josiah coughed. “You’ll understand, Mr. Curtis, after seeing that, a man doesn’t care over much to be about the place at midnight alone. But the mayor thinks with you, that the letter was a blind, and will take no further part in the watch.”

Timothy eyed him shrewdly. “You want me to take up the work, eh?”

“Only at night, sir. Your window is so opportunely placed.”

Tim considered. “This conspiracy, Mr. Smith—you deem it Jacobean, eh?”

“Yes, sir. It is rumoured in London that the Prince has already sailed from Dunkirk. They netted a whole peck of traitors hatching their plots down in Dorset last week, and ’tis known well there are many Jacobites in Bath.”

“Why don’t you apprehend them, then?”

“That is not my work. I am sent here to watch this house. My Lord Pelham has other assistants.”

“Who are they?” asked Tim bluntly.

Josiah flushed crimson; he drew himself up stiffly and stared at Tim.

“I beg your pardon, sir.”

“I asked you who are Lord Pelham’s other assistants; who is—er—watching the conspirators?”

“I cannot tell you, sir,” said Josiah stiffly.

“D’ye mean you don’t know?”

“No, sir. I mean I cannot tell you.”

“Pish!” said Tim shortly; “I’ll not betray the confidence, but I wish to know. Look you, man, a bargain. I will watch this house for you at night and mark the doings o’ these ghosts if you, on your part, will tell me the name of Lord Pelham’s man. If you wish it, I will add some—er—pecuniary value to my side of the bargain.”

Josiah stood still. His face was very red, he twisted his hands nervously together and stared at the ground.

“Mr. Curtis,” he said reproachfully, “you misunderstand me, sir. I’m paid by Lord Pelham to spy on that house, and ’s blood, I’ll spy on it by every means in my power. But I—I’ve my own notion of honesty, sir, and it don’t allow me to risk my master’s interests by betraying those who help him. I ask your pardon for troubling you, Mr. Curtis, and wish you a very good-evening.”

He looked at Timothy with a certain dignity that was almost pathetic, and turning away, walked down the street.

Tim stared after him, biting his lip. “Plague on it!” he muttered. “It would seem I’m the most bedad fool in the kingdom. But I thought him only a spy whom any purse could buy.”

A man swung out of a tavern and almost knocked down Josiah. He started at the sight of him and looked suspiciously from him to Timothy. Then he laughed lightly, and walking up to the latter, laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Come on, Curtis, and have a turn at the cards. Come back to my lodgings and we’ll make a night of it. Gad! what if you be paid by Pelham! Jamie’s men are not so plaguy honest that they can turn up their noses at you.

The friends o’ the top dog are contemptible spies, and the friends o’ the bottom dog are damnable traitors all the world over. For myself, I’d deal a hand or drink a cup with either.”

He linked his arm through Tim’s, and strolled up the street by his side. Tim made no objection. He knew the value of Rory Winnington’s mocking tongue too well to take any count of his words, and after three days’ solitude any companionship was welcome.

“Egad! Curtis, you’re a rare man in a rough and tumble,” continued Rory with a chuckle. “Faith! but we had the liveliest time with you and your table. I’ve not laughed so much since Noll upset the tea-stand on Lady Cornwallis’s cat. What a fool you were not to take it quietly. Lee was for pinking you at the end; he has the devil’s own temper.”

“Hum,” said Tim drily, “so you were there? It strikes me we have an account to settle over that affair.”

“Not I,” said Rory coolly; “I don’t quarrel with any man for swearing when his night’s rest is disturbed.”

He laughed at the cool effrontery of the man. “How is Charles Rathborne?” he asked.

“A bit stiff in the arm where you pinked him, and plunged in melancholy madness for letting you escape. You’re a slippery eel to writhe through their fingers.” He eyed him thoughtfully for a minute. “It’s my belief, Tim, a pair o’ white hands had their share in your escape, eh?”

Tim flushed and made no answer. Rory whistled softly.

“I thought so. Bedad! but you must have the tongue of an angel to win my pretty sister to your side after her reception of you at Tuesday’s ball. Women are plaguy unaccountable creatures.”

"Does any one else guess her share in the matter?" asked Tim hesitatingly.

"Not they," answered Rory with a sudden sternness. "And you will do well, Curtis, to keep it to yourself. If tongues wag about the affair, I shall make it my business to silence them. You understand?"

Tim nodded. "You need not fear I'll take advantage of her—her pity," he said softly.

Rory looked at him thoughtfully. "Look you, Tim," he said suddenly. "Bath air is plaguy unwholesome for you at present. Have you no affairs to call you to town?"

Tim shook his head obstinately. "Not I. I don't leave Bath till I've finished a quest I have in hand."

"What's your quarry, eh?"

"The man—or woman—who holds Pelham's bribe."

Rory looked at him with a queer smile in his eyes.

"Ah-h!" he drawled; "a monstrous entertaining hunt, I'll warrant. Well, if you will stay in the city, be advised—walk in the sun and keep house o' nights, and don't let your sword arm stiffen."

A woman had been following them up the street, at a respectful distance, a pretty, pert-looking creature showily dressed. Now she drew nearer and hailed Rory nervously.

"Mr. Winnington, sir, could I speak to you?"

Rory turned to her with an impatient frown, which melted into a smile of whimsical resignation when he met her beseeching blue eyes.

Tim looked at the girl. "Why, Martha," he said, "it's you, is it? What's to do? Lost your place, eh?"

She bobbed him a curtsy. "Yes, please, Mr. Curtis, I left Lady Wimbourne a week ago. Can't I speak to you, please, Mr. Winnington?"

Rory shrugged his shoulders. "You go on, Curtis," he said shortly. "I'll be with you in a minute." Then he turned to the girl. "Well, my dear, what d'ye want now?" he asked wearily.

She dropped her eyes and scraped her toe nervously to and fro on the gravel. "You—you've not been to see me since Friday last week," she said slowly.

"No," said Rory coldly; "I've had no need to, my dear."

The girl looked up with a startled air. "No need to—?" she repeated slowly; "is it only news you come for then?"

He laughed. "Why, what else did you dream brought me, child?"

She flushed. "You—you said I was the prettiest girl in Bath," she muttered.

"Did I? Egad! my dear, I've said it so often I've lost count of 'em all."

Her mouth drooped: she looked at him beseechingly.

"But, Mr. Winnington, I—I'd be main glad if you'd come again, sir," she whispered entreatingly.

Rory looked down into her blue eyes and wavered, then he set his mouth resolutely and shook his head. "No," he muttered; "I promised Laidie I'd not hurt the girl, and—demme, I'll keep my word." He stooped and pinched her chin playfully. "Wake up, child, you're too pretty a playmate for me—go find you a husband."

She held out her hand entreatingly, but he shook his head smilingly, and with a sudden sob she turned and hurried down the street.

Rory shrugged his shoulders lightly and followed Tim. "Faith! Curtis," he said drily, "I have my virtuous moments, and can play the deaf adder as well as any man."

They emerged into Cheap Street and were nearing the door of Rory's lodgings when a loud voice hailed them from the opposite sidewalk. A tall, erect, handsome, old gentleman dressed in the perfection of fashion stood on the edge of the walk and waved his cane violently to attract their attention. At sight of him Tim clutched Rory's arm with a cry of astonishment.

"Bedad! it's my uncle."

Rory looked from one to the other and burst into a shout of laughter. "Bear up, Tim, he only carries a cane! Why? Didn't you know he was here? They arrived in Bath Thursday last."

"I never heard of it," said Tim, stepping down into the gutter to cross the road.

"I'm not to have your company to-night then?" said Rory. "Well, maybe I'll see you later at Lady Westerby's. There's mettle monstrous attractive there!"

Tim crossed the road to his uncle. The two men faced each other in silence for a moment, then turned and walked along side by side.

"Well," said Lord Westerby curtly, "what is the explanation?"

"I did not know you were in Bath," answered Tim laconically.

"Hum! Poor. Where have you been hiding?"

"Not hiding; doctor's orders."

"Why? Have you been duelling?"

"No. I ran against another man's sword point."

"Ah-h! What are you doing in Bath? Why did you not obey orders and come to Bristol?"

"I find Bath air pleasanter, sir."

Suddenly Lord Westerby stopped and laughed. "You

don't change, my boy,” he said, putting his hand on his arm.

“Nor you, my lord,” answered Tim affectionately. “Is my aunt here with you?”

“Yes, and one in whom you'd do well to take more interest, Miss Dorothy Smallshaw.”

Tim whistled. “Why is she here?” he asked anxiously.

“She finds Bath air pleasant,” chuckled Lord Westerby.

“Don't be a coward, my boy; you'll find her a pretty saucy piece of goods and an heiress to boot.”

Tim set his mouth obstinately and shook his head. Lord Westerby laughed good-naturedly.

“Ah! well, see her, see her, my boy. She hasn't any to surpass her in all Bath, and only one equal in my judgment, and the two beauties are as unlike as sun and moon.”

As they strolled up the street together, they passed many acquaintances bound on their way to church or supper. These greeted Lord Westerby courteously, but it was obvious that Timothy Curtis was still banished from society, his salutations were significantly overlooked. Lord Westerby remarked this, and eyed his nephew quizzically.

“It seems you are not popular here,” he said drily.

“No,” said Tim coolly; “it seems I am not.”

Lord Westerby stopped dead. “Nothing disgraceful, I hope,” he asked sharply.

Tim looked him straight in the eyes. “No, sir,” he said quietly.

Lord Westerby nodded and pursued his way. “Popularity,” he said cynically, “is largely connected with purse strings; but politeness, my boy, can be taught at the sword point.”

Tim flushed and made no answer. At the top of the street

he stopped, and his heart gave a sudden bound. Swinging along in an open chair came Celia Winnington. She was smiling up into the eyes of Lord Robert Dacre, who walked on her right, while Charles Rathborne rested his hand on the door at her left; behind came Sir Peter, linking arms with David Beringer, and Oliver Shirley, the stout and courteous one, brought up the rear, escorting Lady Wimbourne's chair.

Tim stood aside, hat in hand. Celia gave him no greeting, but as she passed she lifted her eyes for a second to his with a long searching look, then the lids were lowered and she turned away her head. The men ignored his presence entirely.

Lord Westerby looked sharply from Celia to his nephew.

"That is the only woman in Bath who can hold a candle to Dorothy," he said emphatically.

"Do you know her?" asked Tim eagerly.

"Know Winnington's niece? Of course I do. So do you."

Tim smiled bitterly. "No," he said shortly; "she does not count me among her acquaintances."

"Ah!" said his uncle slowly. "Then you are a greater fool than I thought you."

Lady Westerby welcomed her nephew affectionately. She had been a beauty in her youth and was, some thought, even more beautiful in her old age. Moreover, she still preserved that subtle power of exciting men's admiration without any effort, of attracting their homage as it were her due, which is the most charming characteristic of a woman born to rule. She had a certain gentle dignity that rebuked impertinence more than any haughty demeanour, and even in that age of ceremony she was noted for her courtliness.

“Your uncle will have told you, Timothy, that Miss Smallshaw has journeyed hither with me, and that it is our wish you should become acquainted with her. She is young, and her spirits are high, and she is wilful on occasion, having been spoiled all her life; but I love her, Tim, and she is very beautiful. She has already learned to be interested in you. Be kind to her for my sake.”

Tim kissed his aunt’s hand. “If she be as beautiful as my uncle reports she will have no lack of champions in Bath. My attentions were but superfluity.”

Lady Westerby smiled. “Were you a woman, Timothy, you would know that to a woman no man’s attentions are a superfluity. And were I a man, my nephew, methinks I should enjoy the conquest of a wife who gave me some trouble in the chase.”

Tim grimaced. “Sense is an excellent thing in woman. If the quarry desire capture, why does it fly?”

“Lud! Timothy, you gallants of the present day are lag-gards indeed. Your uncle—” she stopped and laughed.

Tim laughed and kissed her hand again. “My uncle, madam, reached for a star worthy any man’s agonising to win.”

She laughed and shook her head. “It seems men’s tongues are not less ready though their hearts are lag-gard now. Reach me my fan, dear; the evening is oppressive.”

Timothy rose and crossed to the table for her fan. He turned, and suddenly the fan fell clattering to the ground, and he stood rooted to the spot, his eyes wide with blank astonishment. A woman had entered the room and stood by the door smiling at him; her face was very fair, with an aureole of copper-coloured hair, and the bright eyes that

viewed his amazement with a twinkle of suppressed amusement were the colour of burnt umber.

“Dorothy, allow me to present to you my nephew, Mr. Curtis,” said Lady Westerby ceremoniously. “Timothy, this is Miss Dorothy Smallshaw, my guest.”

CHAPTER XII

“THE SUN”

TIMOTHY bowed, but for the moment his wits deserted him, he could think of nothing to say. He picked up the fan and placed it on the table, and he stood aside to let her pass to a seat in the window, but he was too entirely amazed to utter the compliments usual on an introduction.

Dorothy, for her part, smiled at him in frank amusement; it would appear she attributed his want of aplomb to astonishment at her unexpected charms.

“I have seen you before, Mr. Curtis,” she said. “Is it your custom to ride abroad at noonday without hat or coat?”

Timothy recovered his wits. “Not always, madam,” he said significantly. “At times I walk abroad at nightfall muffled to the eyebrow.”

She gave no sign that she understood the allusion in his words. “I’d give the world to know what had befallen you the other day,” she laughed. “But I suppose I may not ask.”

“I would beg you not to, madam, for I could not tell you, and ’twould break my heart to cause you disappointment,” he said gallantly.

She flashed a merry look at him from under her lashes.

“Lud! sir, are you there already?” she cried saucily. “’Twould seem there are some roads you travel faster than the one to Bristol. But I have already learned that Bath is a city where the tongue wags faster than the brain works.”

“And where, perhaps, the eyes, being privileged, speak faster than either,” he said, smiling at her.

He sat on, exchanging gallantry and compliment and puzzling his brains over the mystery connected with the girl. That it was her face he had seen in the shadow of the curtained window of the empty house he was certain, but what she was doing there and how she had come thence were mysteries he could not fathom. As for the girl herself, in truth, she was very fair with her clear skin, her rich colouring, and her merry face with its quaint little humorous twist of lips and eyebrows when she talked. She was never at a loss for words, and constantly broke into little ripples of laughter, as though she found the world a mightily amusing place. She was dressed very richly, and on her arms and neck wore many gems. She was never still, gesticulating and nodding constantly as she talked, so that the general effect was that of a flashing, glittering jewel.

Timothy, comparing her in his mind with Celia, understood Lord Westerby's similes of sun and moon—here was indeed the rich, blazing, almost brazen beauty of noonday.

Nay, more, there was that in the full lines of her lips, in the subtle movements of her limbs, in the tempting glances she flashed from under her gold-tipped lashes, that suggested a glow, a warmth, a prodigality of passion breathing the luscious sweetness of Southern sunshine.

Presently sounds of arrival were heard below. Dorothy leaned out of the window and blushed.

“’Tis Mr. Winnington, madam,” she said. “He is come to escort us to the concert at the Assembly Rooms.”

Rory entered with his confident air, his mocking smile. He saluted Lady Westerby, and then crossing the room, seated himself coolly on the window seat by Dorothy's side.

“Madam,” he began gaily, “your advent to Bath has caused the greatest brain-racking we’ve had this—sennight. All the poets are seeking new similes for your charms, and all the wits are crazing their intelligences for a name by which to toast you.”

She laughed. “Lud! Mr. Winnington, cannot you give them the benefit of your experience? If rumour speaks true, you have toasted every woman in the kingdom in your day.”

“Rumour, madam, is of the feminine gender and never knows when to hold her tongue.”

“And Presumption is of the male gender, sir, and must not be encouraged.” She rose and walked to a distant seat on the settee, laughing at him over her shoulder.

“You’ve been abroad, madam,” he said, unabashed.

“How know you that?” she asked.

“The enviable earth still clings to your garments,” he said, pointing to a stain on her skirt. “Gad! madam, and cob-webs, too! One would say you had been over house-roofs and down chimney-stacks by the marks.”

She stared at him for a minute, then burst out laughing.

“Heaven keep us,” she cried; “you are amazing! But it is indeed a stain,” she muttered. “I must go change my gown. Mr. Curtis, you will come with us to the Rooms?”

Lady Westerby looked anxiously at her nephew as he walked beside her chair on the way to the Assembly Rooms.

“Dorothy is light-tongued, Tim,” she said apologetically; “but she and Mr. Winnington are old acquaintances. He was in Bristol for full three months in the spring, and much at her father’s house.”

Tim nodded. “They are a well-matched pair,” he said indifferently.

Lady Westerby frowned. "Mr. Winnington has the merriest heart and the readiest tongue of any man I know, but I would not willingly trust him with any woman's happiness. There is matter behind his mockery. He is secretive."

"And Mistress Dorothy—is she transparent, madam?"

"Why, the child is open as the day. Her frankness will be her undoing, I fear. She speaks her mind as rashly as an untutored savage."

Tim lifted his eyebrows and made no answer.

The arrival of Lord Westerby's party at the Assembly Rooms created a sensation. Miss Dorothy Smallshaw had been but two days in Bath, but in those rapid times, two days had sufficed to establish her reputation as the readiest wit and one of the brightest beauties in society; her court awaited her.

The popularity of the Westerbys was great, their coming to the city was welcomed gladly.

The reception accorded to Tim was varied and excited his humour. His appearance under the wing of Lady Westerby and in the train of the new queen considerably changed the aspect of affairs and moderated public opinion; moreover, four days had passed since the hour of his banishment, and the subject was a trifle stale. Nevertheless, gossip still hovered about his name. Men eyed him queerly, and stiffened when he approached them, women flushed with embarrassment while they accepted his gallantries. Dorothy marked their conduct, and when, at nine o'clock, they passed out into the upper rooms for tea, with characteristic frankness Dorothy Smallshaw demanded an explanation.

She was sitting in a little group of men, and Timothy was holding her cup, when she coolly launched her question.

"I have been out o' the world and heard no news since

Queen Anne died. Tell me then—what has Mr. Curtis done to anger you all? It seems he is monstrous unpopular.”

A gasp of surprise went round the circle; the men eyed one another in amused embarrassment. For a moment Tim’s eyes gleamed angrily, then his humour conquered his indignation and he laughed.

“I will enlighten you, madam. There are certain misinformed folk in the city who have been pleased to dub me a spy.”

Dorothy started; for an instant her face grew grave. “A spy,” she whispered. Then her laughter broke out afresh. “You, a spy; fiddle-de-dee, why you have not even eyes to note a woman’s face.”

“Nay, madam, I have been noting women’s faces the evening through,” he said teasingly.

“Women, Lud! Mr. Curtis, there is staleness in numbers. Take one at a time.”

As the evening passed, it became speedily evident that Miss Smallshaw was bent upon distinguishing Timothy with every mark of her favour. She smiled on him, talked to him, jested at him, and he never left her side. Lady Westerby seconded the girl’s efforts; she smiled upon the couple, and was evidently resolute to bring them together.

“Now we have caught you, Timothy, we will keep you,” she laughed. “You must be our escort while we remain in Bath. And in truth, ’tisn’t possible you should wish to escape.”

“From you, madam? Good heavens, no.”

She sighed and shook her head. “Where are your eyes, sir, that you turn from youth to age?”

Mr. Nash came near to offer to Lady Westerby the ceremonious welcome he considered due to new arrivals. She

had been of those who knew and admired him in the heyday of his reign as King of Bath, and in her gracious kindness, she ever accorded him the same respect, though age and increasing poverty had robbed him of much of his former buoyant confidence.

"The scene does not change, Mr. Nash," she said, with a little sigh at memory of bygone days. "Beauty and wit and gallantry still make the world go round."

Mr. Nash looked round the crowded rooms with a frown of discontent. "It may be my eyes grow dim and my ears hard of hearing, madam, but it appears to me that beauty and wit lack the brightness of twenty years ago. And for gallantry—'tis going, 'tis going, madam. Our modern gallants, 'twould seem, have no leisure left to woo."

"Perchance they have no hearts to love with, Mr. Nash. I have but now rebuked my nephew concerning laggard love."

Nash eyed Tim sternly. "Mr. Curtis, madam, requires no spur." He turned to him with a sudden assumption of his old, outspoken, tyrannous manner. "You should learn, Mr. Curtis, that 'tis only upstarts who force themselves undesired on a lady's company."

Tim flushed crimson with anger. But Mr. Nash was a privileged person. If he could scold a duchess for her inelegant costume, he could assuredly rebuke a gentleman for ill-behaviour. There was no redress. Tim bowed haughtily and turned away.

Lady Westerby intervened. "Permit me to present you to my debutante, Miss Dorothy Smallshaw, one of our newest beauties, Mr. Nash."

"I have heard of her already, madam, and am eager to offer her my compliments." The old beau shook out his

ruffles, fixed his glass and favoured Dorothy with a bow no man in that assembly could equal. The curtsy with which she responded evidently met with his approval, he poured forth a complimentary address of welcome.

“Bath is honoured, honoured indeed, madam, by your sojourn here. We do not lack beauty in our company, but new loveliness is ever welcome, and I vow you will not find our gallants slow in offering their homage. Ah, madam, there will be sword points flashing, I fear, unless you veil your eyes.”

Dorothy smiled with evident pleasure. “Lud! sir, ’twould seem in this company, there are beauties enough for all.”

“We do not lack stars, madam, and there is one here who has already been toasted as the Moon. But methinks until this hour, we have missed the glory of the sun to complete our heaven.”

“Bravo, beau!” cried Rory; “you’ve hit it. Miss Smallshaw is the rollicking sunbeam that peers into every cranny and dances into every heart, and out again.”

Dorothy laughed at him saucily. “Monstrous complimentary, I vow.”

Nash eyed him sternly. “Your interpretation, sir, is as poor as your gallantry,” he said stiffly.

“Mr. Nash, you speak of the Moon. Who is my rival?” asked Dorothy bluntly.

“Madam, there should be no rivalry in beauty. Venus may vie with Minerva, but not with a sister grace,” answered Nash, with somewhat mixed mythology. “For every beauty has her own light and every light is various.”

Dorothy pouted at the rebuke. “Nevertheless, who is the Moon?”

“Miss Celia Winnington.”

She looked up at Rory questioningly.

"My sister," he explained.

"I should like to be presented to her," she said slowly.

Mr. Nash stepped eagerly forward, seeing occasion for a ceremony in the presentation of the two beauties.

"Might I have that honour, madam, and conduct you to her?"

Dorothy eyed him wickedly. "You would have me go to her, Mr. Nash? Wherefore?"

The poor beau started, seeing the threatenings of one of those wars of precedence through which he had so often struggled. "The newest comer, madam," he stammered.

Dorothy laughed and gave him her hand; and with an air of importance and a walk that bespoke ceremonious consideration in every step, Mr. Nash escorted her through the room to the spot where Celia held her court under Adelaide's wing. Dorothy eyed her rival curiously and frankly owned to herself the beauty of her face. She flashed a glance round the attendant circle of gentlemen, and smiled when she marked Lord Westerby among their number. Mr. Nash effected the introduction with a wealth of flowery compliment, and the two ladies swept low curtseys.

"Madam, I have come to salute the Moon," said Dorothy.

"Madam," responded Celia, smiling, "the poor Moon pales at the advent of your light."

It was not the first time Celia had viewed her rival; she had studied her face all through the evening concert, studied it with a little pang of jealousy, since Timothy Curtis, too, appeared to notice its attractions.

"I am vastly honoured to make your acquaintance," con-

tinued Dorothy. “I have long been acquainted with your brother.”

“With Rory?” Her face softened. “Ah! then I trust we may see much of you, madam. Adelaide, let me present to you a friend of Rory’s.”

“Dorothy,” said Lord Westerby, “Lady Wimbourne and her sister will breakfast with us here to-morrow and join our riding party on Claverton Down.”

Dorothy’s eyes brightened. “Lud! That’s monstrous delightful. We’ll be a goodly company.”

“Claverton Down will be for one short morning the envied of the heavens,” said Davie Beringer, who having small wit of his own, was wont to enlarge upon that of others, “for they can boast but one light at a time.”

The ladies parted with ceremonious farewells, and Dorothy moved away with Lord Westerby. Adelaide looked after her with a frown.

“I do not like her, Celia,” she whispered. “I do not trust her. I pray to Heaven she may not cast her favours to Rory.”

“Rory,” said Celia. “Oh, Rory—” she gave a gesture implying extraordinary indifference to her brother’s entrapping. Adelaide looked at her shrewdly, and turned away with a sigh.

A merry company rode out to Claverton Down the following morning under Lord Westerby’s leadership. The host himself monopolised Celia with a skill born of many years’ experience in the art; it was evident that he already ranked himself among her devotees; and Celia welcomed the attentions of this shrewd, kindly courtier, who would ask nothing in return. Ormonde and Rathborne, who hovered in the rear, scowled at the erect back of the elderly beau.

Tracy rode with his wife, and presently, Lord Robert joined them. "No news yet?" he asked, glancing back to see they were not overheard.

"None. But it may come any moment. It is well we are prepared."

"What do you think of the latest addition to your company?" Tracy frowned. "A feather-brained fool, as rattled as Rory himself. 'Tis pure madness; the affair is too serious to play pranks. I shall speak to Rory."

"What is it now?" asked Adelaide curiously.

Tracy looked at Lord Robert, and shook his head.

"Sweetheart, leave us to intrigue as we choose, but do you keep clear of the affair. It is no woman's work."

"You will not trust me any more," she said humbly.

"With our lives, madam," interposed Lord Robert quickly, "if it could do any good. But we would not have you bear a jot more anxiety on your mind than is necessary. As for Curtis—" he hesitated a moment, eyeing Timothy thoughtfully from afar, "demme, Tracy, if I can understand the man. He makes no move. But then we watch him well."

"There seems one likely to take the task off our hands," said Tracy, nodding toward Dorothy, who rode ahead in a posse of men. "She holds him close enough to-day."

Timothy rode by Dorothy's side, watching her with a serious intentness. All his curiosity was aroused, and he was not one to sit indifferent when any mystery baffled his intelligence. She seemed so open, so amazingly outspoken, that had he not seen her at the window in the house of the coiffeuse, he would have written her down at once a merry-hearted coquette, and have taken small interest in her doings.

"You must know, gentlemen," she said, throwing a mis-

chievous look in Timothy’s direction, “that Mr. Curtis is such a man as Diogenes himself vainly sought for. Think on the marvel! He was offered a wife and a fortune would he but ride to Bristol, and lo! he took horse and galloped forthwith to Bath.”

Timothy flushed, and then laughed good-humouredly. “Is there any matter in heaven and earth, madam, you do not know?”

She laughed. “Not many, sir.” Then she hummed a bar of “When Jamie comes again,” and threw a mocking glance at Rory. “In truth, I know what many would give a fortune to discover.”

“And what’s that, madam?” asked Sir Simon Dewhurst eagerly.

Rory jerked his rein suddenly and his horse reared. Dorothy laughed. “Steady, steady, Mr. Winnington. All is not yet lost. Ah! but you sit well. You would learn what I know, Sir Simon?—why the thoughts of my own heart.” She threw him a most tender glance. “Would not many give much to discover them?” she asked saucily.

CHAPTER XIII

A TANGLED SKEIN

WHEN Timothy returned to his lodgings after his morning ride he was annoyed to find no servant in attendance. The worthy Simon, despite his genius for stupidity, was no laggard in the observance of his duties, his absence was consequently remarkable.

The landlady, summoned from the back regions, could shed no enlightenment, save that he had gone out in company with another man soon after his master's departure. She further informed Timothy that two gentlemen had called to see him, and had waited for an hour in his rooms, but had finally lost patience at the delay and had gone, leaving no message.

Vowing vengeance on Simon's truancy, Tim mounted to his room, and prepared his toilette for the afternoon garden fête at Prior Park, whither he was bound in company with Lady Westerby.

As he wandered into the outer room in search of a better light by which to tie his cravat, his eye was caught by a paper lying half hidden under his bureau. Mechanically he picked it up, and was surprised to find it was one of his private papers, which he was wont to keep in the inner compartment of his desk.

With an oath of astonishment, he tried the lid of his bureau; it was locked securely. Taking out his keys he opened it. At the first glance, all was apparently in order, but further investigation confirmed his suspicions, that the

place had been ransacked in his absence. He noticed that certain papers were folded differently and placed in a different order, that the dust on the inner compartments had been disturbed, that a smear of freshly spilled ink stained the wood.

The discovery enraged him. His first supposition was that his servant had robbed him and absconded, but further search seemed to prove that nothing had been taken. As he puzzled over the matter, the door was burst open and Simon ran panting into the room. Timothy seized him by the collar and shook him savagely.

"What have you been up to, you rogue?" he demanded sharply. "Why were you not here when I arrived? What the devil do you mean by leaving my rooms open and empty for any thief to enter and ransack at will?"

"Thief!" muttered the man dully, staring round.

"Yes, thief, you idiot. Who has been tampering with my desk?"

"I don't know, master. But you are safe," answered Simon.

"Safe! Safe! What do you mean, fellow? Are you crazy? Why the plague shouldn't I be safe?"

Simon scratched his head. "The man told me that you had met with an accident on the London Road, sir, and said I was to ride out at once to attend you."

"What man?"

"I don't know, sir," said Simon vaguely. "He came on a horse."

"And you believed a cock-and-bull tale like that," cried Timothy desperately, "and trailed over the country, leaving my rooms free to any light-fingered Jack? Oh! you——"

He turned to close his desk, puzzling over the identity of the men. It was evidently the work of the Jacobite conspirators, a search for their lost papers; he chuckled at their disappointment.

A sudden thought struck him. He reopened the inner drawer and ran his eyes rapidly over the contents; then he drew in his lips with a long whistle. The note of warning which he had received the evening before he was kidnapped had been taken.

This discovery put a new aspect upon the affair. It was possible that the men might be emissaries of Lady Wimbourne, sent by her to destroy her letter, lest it betray to others her interference with their plan, but this was not likely. It was too risky a proceeding to commend itself, even to the harebrained intelligence of a woman intrigante. Timothy returned to his former surmise that the visitors had been in search of the stolen papers, and had lighted upon this letter by accident. But if that were so, what would be their treatment of Adelaide?

Timothy's chivalrous pity for the woman was aroused. He must spare her if it were possible; at least, he must warn her of the theft.

For one short minute he did indeed harbour the thought that the discovery of Adelaide's guilt would clear his name and spare him further trouble, but he dismissed it manfully.

"No!" he muttered. "There are things a gentleman can't do. I can't clear myself at the expense of a woman. She shall right me to Celia; for the others, I'll look out for myself."

With this resolve he set out to join Lady Westerby and accompany her and Dorothy to the afternoon fête.

The afternoon was dull and very oppressive, heavy

thunder clouds piled the horizon and the air was electric with the threat of a coming storm. The company, gathered on the lawns and in the alleys of Mr. Allen's garden, was languid and dull, and the entertainment dragged wearily.

Only Miss Dorothy Smallshaw's high spirits seemed proof against the prevailing depression. She laughed and talked as gaily as ever and rallied her companions upon their dulness.

"Lud! gentlemen, I vow you are all as stale as a Pump Room biscuit. What ails you? I must find you matter for conversation. Interpret to me why Mr. Curtis, having set out for Bristol, found himself at Bath?"

"Madam, I had not then beheld the glory of Bristol," interposed Tim quickly; the subject annoyed him.

"La, la, you would win pardon by gallantry. Never fear, Mr. Curtis, I would never blame a man for love of freedom. But why Bath, sir?"

Curious eyes looked at Tim. He flushed with annoyance.

Dorothy laughed mischievously. "Did you track a quarry, sir? Ah, ah, Mr. Curtis, you blush! Come, gentlemen, a little persistence, and we'll fathom his secret."

Tim's temper fled. "Beware, madam, lest I seek to fathom yours," he said significantly. "May not a man look in at a window, as well as a woman may look out?"

For the fraction of a second a startled look dawned in her eyes. Then she laughed defiantly. "I vow, here is Mr. Curtis propounding riddles. I'll read you the answer: 'There are many women in the world and many windows, and they are as alike as chalk to cheese, or—Jamie to Geordie.'"

The men around stared from her to Timothy with puzzled

faces. Rory laughed softly, and eyed her with a glance of wondering admiration.

“The height of your conversation is above me, madam. Will you not walk? The Italian Garden is worthy even your presence. And I’ll warrant, I’ll find subjects enow for conversation, if you will but be silent long enough to permit me to speak.”

“You are amazing impudent, Mr. Winnington, yet ’tis too hot to oppose you. But I warn you I shall expect you to be as vastly entertaining as Mr. Walpole himself.”

“I cry you mercy, madam. Do not look for Horry’s inanities from me. My wit is crystal.”

“Ay! it requires long gazing to see anything in it,” answered Dorothy promptly.

Laughing, they walked off together. When they had passed from the lawn into the shadow of a yew-hedged walk, Rory looked down at her with a reproving headshake.

“Madam, you sail too near the wind. Do you not know Mr. Curtis has the reputation of seeing too far into other folk’s affairs? Be careful with him.”

She blushed, half ashamed. “Do you believe him to be a spy?” she asked.

“’Pon my soul, madam, I’m not sure. He’s demmed elusive. But he suspects something. ’Tis not every noon a man sees a face at the window of an empty house.”

She laughed. “Lud! it seems he saw me sure enough. I had hoped he would believe it a vision. But I do not think him a spy, Mr. Winnington; ’tis an honest face.”

He looked at her thoughtfully. “And a spy can have no virtues, you hold?”

She hesitated. “Espionage is hardly noble work. And yet a spy goes with his life in his hands. There must be some

virtue in a courage that can laugh on the brink of an abyss."

"You think that, madam?"

"Indeed, yes. No man surely could risk death without a qualm."

"Better death than dulness. A spy must have such hours of excitement as no lesser stake could give."

"I protest I am interested in Mr. Curtis."

"And I protest I'm jealous of your interest," laughed Rory. "Is it the man or the spy you admire?"

"Both. The man, because he refused to marry me——"

"Egad! A queer reason, but rare enough, I warrant. And the spy——?"

"Because I love all courage."

"You have plenty, madam."

"Not I; I have one grim fear. I cannot abide the thought of death. To go out of the sunshine, alone. Horrible!"

Rory looked down on the bright company in the Italian Garden, and gave a little shiver. "Out of the sunshine," he muttered. "Gad! madam, you make a man almost afraid."

Tim, freed from the duty of escorting Dorothy, wandered through the gardens in search of Adelaide. He found her soon, but surrounded by acquaintances, and though he followed and watched her the afternoon through, he could get no private speech with her. Only just on the eve of departure, when she waited in the hall while Tracy sought their coach, was he able to approach her. Celia stood a little apart talking to Lord Robert and Rathborne, and Adelaide was for the moment alone.

"I must speak to you, Lady Wimbourne," he urged quickly. "Will you give me a moment?"

"What is it, Mr. Curtis? Why do you not speak to my

husband?" said Adelaide, looking at him with a frightened glance.

"It is urgent, madam, and private."

Adelaide stepped back. "Private!" she said sharply. "I have no private affairs with you."

"For Heaven's sake, madam, be reasonable," urged Tim irritably. "It is for your own sake. If you will not listen, Tracy must learn what you have done."

"What I have done? Do you threaten me?"

"For pity's sake," cried Tim desperately. But her agitation had been remarked by the others. In a moment Lord Robert was by her side.

"Mr. Curtis," he said sharply, "in future see to it that you leave this lady unmolested, or I shall assuredly call you to account."

He took her hand and led her toward the door. Timothy fell back with an angry shrug of his shoulders.

"A wilful woman must have her way," he muttered. "I can do no more for her. But if this demmed impertinence is to continue, I shall be plaguy near venting my temper on somebody."

He returned home much soured in temper. He had no heart for the coquettish gaiety of Miss Smallshaw, so he wandered down to the "Bear Inn" for an evening's play. Early though it was, many men were gathered round the tables, and in a few minutes after his arrival Rory entered, and hailing Tim challenged him to *écarté*. At first they played with varying fortune, then Rory began steadily to lose. For half an hour he bore it with equanimity, then he became restless. With unmoved countenance he began to have recourse to the various most approved methods of winning luck. First, he shifted his seat. That having no re-

sult, he unfastened a seal from his fob and placed it on his stake. Thirdly, he took off his coat. This final action appeared to appease fortune, for luck became again equal. Rory sighed with relief.

"Queer thing, Tim," he said solemnly; "demmed queer thing. Dame Fortune is as hard to woo as a woman."

Tim looked across and nodded. Then he stopped in the middle of his deal, his eyes riveted on Rory's waistcoat. The top was unbuttoned and in the opening a folded paper. In one corner of the paper was a green wafer, a "W" inscribed in a circle of leaves; the writing was in the same hand as the note he had received on the eve of his kidnapping.

Tim dropped the cards, his hand shot out toward Rory.

"That's mine!" he said sharply. "You have stolen it from my room this morning."

Rory sprang back, upsetting his chair. "What the devil are you talking about?" he asked angrily.

"That letter. You have stolen it from my rooms."

Rory put his hand up to the paper, and pushed it out of sight. He eyed Tim queerly.

"If I did not know that you were crazy, Tim, I'd call you to account for such a demmed insolent accusation," he said angrily. "Plague take you! Are you the only man in the world to receive a billet-doux?"

Many eyes were turned on them curiously at the sound of the angry voices and overturned chair. Rory noted this. He picked up the chair and leaned across the table, one hand over his letter.

"It's like enough you've had letters from the same hand," he said softly. "She's plaguy—er—liberal. But this is mine. Another time keep your jealousy chained if you'd play with gentlemen."

He picked up his winnings, and throwing on hat and coat, strode angrily out of the room.

Tim bit his lip with vexation. He recognised the reasonableness of Rory's defence, and was ashamed of the impulse that had led him to hurl his accusation of theft. But Rory's words puzzled him—they would seem to imply that the letter was not from Lady Wimbourne. Bewildered, he turned into his lodgings, and taking his stand in the little side window, he stared out at the house of the coiffeuse. He could see nothing, the alley was pitch dark. All was still, only a few belated revellers at the neighbouring tavern disturbed the silence of Boat-Stall Lane.

An idle whim seized him. He carried a lantern to his window sill and tilted it so that the rays of light were focussed on the little round window low in the wall opposite. "Now," he muttered, "we'll see what more visions the crystal will disclose."

He tied a coin to the end of the long lash of his riding whip, and leaning out swung it across the passage and flicked the glass sharply. The tap of the coin echoed against the high blank walls. Again and again he repeated the experiment with no result, but at last his patience was rewarded. A large red hand parted the curtains and a face peered out into the darkness. The dim light of the lantern illumined it, and Tim recognised the cadaverous countenance of Mr. John Cogswell, Mayor of Bath.

Tim drew in his whip, blew out his lantern and sat down with a blank countenance to puzzle out the situation. What was the mayor doing in a house he had expressly desired his co-operation in watching? Was he hiding there the better to play the spy? Was he prisoner? Or was the charge of conspiracy but a blind, and the house of the little coiffeuse

a gathering-place of a very different nature? A woman's figure had been spied on the roof, a woman's face had appeared at the window. It was very clear the house possessed another entrance besides the demure brown door.

Timothy inclined strongly to this new opinion. He recollected a distinct nervous reluctance in the mayor's manner on the occasion of his visit; even then it had appeared that he was urged on by his companions, rather than eager himself. It was quite conceivable that the house was used as a gambling den, or as a convenient spot for revels of an even less respectable nature; quite conceivable that the mayor lent his encouragement privately to what officially he was obliged to discountenance, and that Josiah's suspicions were utterly unfounded.

The more he thought over the matter, the more Timothy became convinced that he was on the right track. With Charity Farm at their disposal, it seemed inconceivable that the Jacobite conspirators should wish to hold meetings in the town, where the danger of discovery was so infinitely greater.

What Dorothy Smallshaw was doing in such a house it puzzled him but little to guess. Dorothy's heart, he had already decided, was large and liberal, and such a house would serve as a convenient meeting-place with one whose acquaintance Lady Westerby might refuse to countenance. The world is full of adventures and Dorothy an heiress.

Meanwhile, behind the shuttered and shrouded windows of the house of the coiffeuse, a busy scene was being enacted. Men in shirt sleeves, with sweating foreheads and panting breaths, were toiling busily, carrying heavy cases up the narrow stairway from a room at the end of the hall where they were piled, and stowing them away securely in

the long upper chamber, the windows of which, heavily shuttered, looked out upon Boat-Stall Lane. The whole of this room was lined with a double wall, a space of three feet being left between the inner wall and the outer one of panelled wainscot which could be pushed aside. In this space the cases were hidden away. For this was the hiding-place which Marie Grieve had prepared with the help of the Dawsons during the two years she had occupied the house, in preparation for the coming of the Stuart.

The men worked rapidly, toiling up the stairs with ease after case of the ammunition they had brought into the town in sedan chairs, in readiness for the seizure of the city for King James. They worked silently in their stocking-feet; there were empty rooms between the stairway and the next house, but it was clear they would run no risk of discovery.

Four nights they had toiled thus, stowing away each evening what they had sent during the day, for the carriers of the chairs had opportunity only to deposit their burdens in the lower room during the daytime, when any hour might bring a genuine visitor to the coiffeuse. But now the last cases had been cleared from the farm, and as midnight chimed from the Abbey clock, the final one was stowed behind the wainscot, and the weary men proceeded to clear away every trace of their movements and to put on their coats preparatory to departure.

“What’s that queer tapping?” asked Oliver Shirley suddenly, lifting his head to listen. “Cogswell, can you see any one from the window?”

The mayor, whose Jacobite sympathies made him an invaluable ally to the conspirators, crossed the hall and peered between the muslin curtains.

"Don't lift the curtains, you gaby," whispered Ormonde sharply; "there's a light outside."

Cogswell dropped the curtains and stepped back with a frightened air. "No one is there," he said. "The light is in Mr. Curtis's window."

"Devil take the fellow, will he never be satisfied?" muttered Marcus savagely. "'Twas you set him on this house, Cogswell."

"I couldn't help myself, sir; Smith and Simpson forced my hand, and indeed then I supposed he would be a less dangerous spy than that d—— Josiah."

"It's my opinion he has had too long a rope as it is," said Lord Stavely. "There are some occasions on which even assassination is justified if we cannot trap him."

"Here's Tracy," said a voice on the landing above. The men trooped up the stairs and encountered Tracy emerging from a small room at the back.

His customary quiet demeanour was disturbed; his eyes were angry, his whole appearance bespoke a suppressed irritation. The men crowded round him with eager questioning.

"Any news, Tracy?"

"News!" he cried irritably. "How should I know? Here's a despatch come from McFee at Dunkirk, and I can't read a word of it."

"Can't read it?"

"No. It is in cipher, and the key was with those papers Curtis has stolen. Devil take him!"

There was a moment of tense silence. Then Rory began to laugh softly. "It's so demmed funny," he said apologetically.

"Funny!" cried Tracy angrily. "It's desperation! The messenger——"

“Ah! what does he say?”

“He knows nothing of the contents of the despatches; but he says one of the frigates that sailed with the Prince has returned to Dunkirk disabled. It appears they fell in with the English fleet off Cornwall. It is believed that the Prince’s ship got clean away and sailed north, but where he is or what his plans are now, Heaven may know, I don’t.”

A look of consternation passed round the circle. Lord Stavely shrugged his shoulders. “Stuart luck!” he muttered resignedly.

“And here is this despatch from McFee as useless as a bit of burnt paper,” muttered Tracy, staring hopelessly at a roll of paper he drew out of his inner pocket.

“And here are we with our necks in the noose, and blind as addle-pated owls,” muttered Oliver Shirley whimsically.

Tracy looked round with a remorseful face. “I’m very sorry, gentlemen,” he said. “My carelessness has brought you to this.”

Lord Robert put his hand on his shoulder. “Nonsense, Tracy, you are not responsible.”

“Egad! no; ’tis that cursed spy opposite,” said Stavely savagely.

“For my part I feel no call for choking yet,” said Rory gaily. “The noose is not drawn tight. Give me the cipher, Tracy; I’ve worked out some in my time, and it’s possible I may get the sense of this one. I will try to-night.”

Tracy handed him the paper, and he secreted it in his inner pocket.

“It’s very uncertain you’ll be able to decipher it,” he said despondently. “We must get back those papers from Curtis by some means. They were not on him when we took him;

he must have hidden them in his rooms, for our necks assure us he hasn't sent them to Pelham."

"Lee and I drew his rooms this morning," said Stavely. "We ransacked every nook and cranny."

"And found nothing?"

Stavely hesitated. "Not what we sought. But—er—Lee has something to show you, Wimbourne."

"Lee? He came in just behind me. Where is he?"

Roger Lee stepped out of the group; his face was flushed with embarrassment.

"I would not have told you, Wimbourne," he said, "only it's too risky, it must be stopped. We found this letter among Curtis's papers. It warns him of our plot to kidnap him last Wednesday, and it is written by—a woman."

"A woman?" cried Tracy. "Nonsense. What woman knew of it?"

"There's but one woman in our secrets," said Stavely significantly. "Your wife, Wimbourne."

"My wife!" said Tracy sharply. "Where is this letter?" Lee handed him the scented note. Tracy read it and his face grew white. He passed it to his brother-in-law.

"'Tis Laidie's paper, Rory," he said unsteadily. "But she has disguised her hand."

Rory took the letter and examined it carefully; there was a queer light in his eyes.

"This is not Laidie's doing," he said resolutely. "Any one could steal the paper, and the hand is not disguised, 'tis too regular."

"But what other woman knew of the affair?"

"Miss Smallshaw," suggested Lord Robert.

"She did not arrive in Bath until Thursday," said Rory quickly.

Tracy shook his head. "It is my wife's paper and seal. She was aware of the plot to lay him by the heels, and women are very pitiful. If you will permit it, gentlemen, I will make this my affair."

He held out his hand for the letter. Rory retained it, eyeing him queerly. "Gad! Tracy," he said, "you have a genius for hunting the wrong hare."

Tracy frowned. "Give me the letter, Rory," he said sharply.

Still Rory hesitated. "If Laidie denies the charge?" he asked slowly.

Tracy lifted his head and looked round the circle of men. "If my wife deny the charge," he said proudly, "I shall know it unfounded, and seek elsewhere for the writer."

Rory nodded, satisfied, and handed him the letter. There were one or two doubtful faces in the group, but no one made any further objection.

"And now for Curtis and those papers," said Tracy. "What's to be done?"

"The fellow has had too long a rope already, Wimbourne," urged Stavely. "The papers are not in his rooms; he must carry them on his person now. In any case, we must trap him and make him disgorge them."

"It is a difficult matter. We can't take him openly; we can't risk a disturbance at his rooms and——"

"He's so monstrous careful o' the night air," said Ormonde with a laugh.

"Cannot we entice him here?" suggested Stavely. "There must be some lure to draw the fellow. What are his weaknesses—wine, women or cards?"

Ormonde shook his head. "None of those will draw him. He's a slippery fish."

“Well, rack your brains and lose no chances,” said Tracy. “It’s time we were away now. Is all safe here?”

They picked up coats and hats and followed Tracy into the little room at the back. On one side stood a tall cupboard reaching to the ceiling, full of boxes, cloths, stands and other accessories of the coiffeuse’s art. A rope ladder hung at one end of the cupboard from a trap in the roof which was open. Up this they climbed quickly, one by one. They pulled up the ladder behind them, unhooked it, and shut down the trap, replacing the loose tiles over it.

They crept silently along the roofs till they reached an open skylight, through which they climbed down into the house below, a little tavern in Cock Alley, which enjoyed a bad reputation as a gambling den. As they passed through the house they encountered no one, but despite the late hour the place was still astir; there was the sound of voices, the rattling of dice, and the clinking of glasses behind the closed doors. A man who sat behind the bar looked up and nodded as they passed him, and in parties of two and three they went out and hurried away down the dark alley.

Rory was the last to cross the roof; he paused on the edge of the skylight and smiled up into the starlit sky.

“’Twill be a short shrift when it does come,” he muttered. “And I felt the prick at my throat to-night. Why the plague doesn’t Tim burn his letters? Well, I can’t go back on my tracks now, and it’s a game worth the playing; there’s no stake sends the blood coursing through the veins like the risk of a man’s life. But I’d give my left hand to know who holds those blessed papers.”

He dropped down into the attic, but he did not follow the others out of the house. Instead he turned to the left down

a passage, and tapped at a door at the end. A weary voice bade him enter. Rory opened the door and walked in.

At the far side of the room a girl sat sewing with an air of sullen and unwilling industry. She took no notice of his entrance, but went on with her work without lifting her head.

Rory watched her a moment, then he broke into his low soft laugh. The girl wheeled round in her chair, dropped her work and springing to her feet ran toward him with outstretched arms.

“Ah!” she cried joyously; “you’ve come again!”

Rory laughed, patted her cheek and tucking one small brown hand under his arm drew her across the room to her empty chair. He sank into it and the girl seated herself on the table close beside him, devouring his face with looks of devotion.

“Yes, Martha, my dear,” he said slowly, “I have come again. You see your blue eyes are not so easily forgotten.”

The girl pouted. “You wouldn’t look at them yesterday, Mr. Winnington. You were cruel to me.”

Rory pinched her chin. “You chose an inopportune moment, my pretty.” He looked idly at her work-roughened fingers. “So you are being a good girl and working for your living again, eh?”

“Needs must—or starve,” she answered sulkily.

“Tut! We’ll not let it come to that. Mother Hobbes will keep you off the street till we find you a stout husband.”

The girl wrenched her hand away angrily. Rory laughed.

“You’re not for a husband? Egad! you’re as unreasonable as every other woman. Why did you run away from your place?”

"I was afeard to stay, after what I'd done to them," she muttered.

He shook his head. "You were much more useful to me there."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Ah! you think o' nothing but how I can serve you," she cried.

Rory took her face between his hands and looked thoughtfully into her blue eyes. "You pretty pigeon," he said slowly, "I'd give much to know what other men have found you as useful."

"You're monstrous unkind, Mr. Winnington," she sobbed. "I'd ha' done it for no man but you, and you know it. I believe I hate you."

He kissed the pouting mouth and released her. Then he drew from his pocket the scented note Timothy had claimed earlier in the evening.

"You sent me this? Why?"

"I—I wanted you to come back to me."

"Ah-h! To how many others have you written on this paper, which I gather you stole from your mistress?"

"I've written to no one but you—and the letter you made me write last week to Mr. Curtis," she answered sulkily.

"Hum, well, possibly you are speaking the truth. But now I want your promise not to be too liberal with your letters, my dear. If you have any more o' this paper, burn it, and don't let your pretty writing come to the sight of Sir Tracy, Mr. Lee, or Lord Robert Dacre. Promise?"

The girl eyed him wonderingly. "Why?" she asked defiantly.

"Because they are on the track of the writer of that letter to warn Mr. Curtis. Should they learn the truth, the consequences would be almost as awkward for you as for me."

She set her mouth obstinately. "What does it matter what happens to me?" she said. "Much you would care."

Rory eyed her with his whimsical smile. "As you will, my dear. But the consequences to me would be unpleasant—demmed unpleasant."

For a moment she wavered, then she snatched his hand and covered it with kisses. "Ah! you know, you know, I wouldn't have you hurt. I'll write no more to any but you."

He patted her cheek. "Good girl. I knew you'd be reasonable. But don't write to me again, child. 'Tisn't safe."

"Then you will come and see me," she pleaded. "You will come to-morrow?"

He nodded carelessly and rose to his feet.

"I'll see you again, never fear."

"And you won't drive me away as you did before?" she cried suspiciously, clinging to his hand. "You won't be so cruel and you will come? You won't forget?"

He released himself gently from her clinging hands. "Little fool!" he said caressingly, "you must let me go now. I'll not forget you, but you must learn to be content. And get a husband, girl; there will be too many bees where the honey is so sweet. It's high time you learnt wisdom."

He pushed her gently from him and strode away whistling, but she dropped her face on her arms and burst into angry sobbing.

"I hate him! hate him!" she cried savagely. "Ah! how I wish I could hate him!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE LURE

WHEN Sir Tracy Wimbourne reached home after his meeting with the conspirators in the deserted house, his wife was already in bed and asleep. He went softly into her room, and stood looking down at her as she lay, with one white arm flung wide across the coverlet, and her dark hair half shrouding her face. His stern eyes softened as he watched her.

"I will not disturb her to-night," he resolved; "to-morrow will be time enough, poor child! If it be treachery, 'twas pity that prompted it."

But as he turned away he tripped on the rug and woke her. She started up with a cry and slipped her hand mechanically under her pillow. "Who is it?" she whispered breathlessly.

Tracy turned back. "Ah! you are awake, Laidie. I came in to speak to you. But wait till to-morrow, dear."

"No, no, Tracy; what is it?" she cried eagerly, sitting up and brushing back the hair from her eyes. "Has the Prince come?"

He sat on the side of the bed and took her hand. "Don't be afraid, dear, 'tis not serious. But we had a meeting to-night and Roger Lee brought me this. He found it in Mr. Curtis' rooms."

He fumbled in his pocket for the letter. A frightened look crept into her eyes. "In his rooms?" she whispered. "What is it?"

He handed her the note. She opened it quickly and a look

of relief crossed her face. "Who wrote it?" she asked simply.

Tracy watched her doubtfully. "That is what we must discover," he said slowly; "it is your paper, Laidie."

"Yes," she cried indignantly, "my paper and seal. What impertinent has dared to use it?"

"You know nothing of it?" he asked quietly.

"I? Tracy!" she cried quickly, "you don't—you couldn't suspect me?"

"Who else knew of the plot to entrap him? Did you tell any one? Celia?"

She shook her head. "No. Oh! surely, surely you know I could not betray your plans," she pleaded. "I've been careless, ah, so careless, you've no reason to trust me again; but you know I could not betray you."

"Pity drives a woman down queer paths," he said slowly.

"Pity!" she cried contemptuously. "Do you think I pity him? I would gladly see him killed if that would spare you one finger-ache. And yet he has been very good to me," she added softly.

Tracy took her hands in his. "Laidie, you must give me your word of honour that you know nothing of this letter," he said sternly.

"Tracy!" she cried indignantly. Then she bowed her head with a pitiful little smile. "Yes, yes, you are right," she said humbly, "I have not deserved your trust. But I swear, by my love for you, that I know nothing of it."

He kissed her. "Then think no more of it, dear."

"Ah, but, Tracy, I must! The others will not believe me. Let me do something to prove my faith. Let me help in the work."

"No, I will not have you concerned more in the affair."

Her face fell. "You don't trust me yet?"

"Yes, I trust you—but——"

"You would not give me more occasion than needs to try your trust," she said with a sob. "Ah! let me help."

He soothed her tenderly but would give no heed to her prayer for confidence, and when he left her at last, she felt his trust hung in the balance, and resolved to take her own path and prove her innocence.

Tracy, alone in his dressing room, shook his head over the mystery of the letter. "Laidie is cleared," he said with a sigh of relief. "There remains Celia. If she has written it, knowing what she does about him, Heaven help her."

The following morning Adelaide drew Lord Robert aside on the terrace of the walks and urged her plea to help in the work of conspiracy.

"Tracy has told me of the letter," she began rapidly, "he believes me, but——"

"So do we all, madam," said Lord Robert earnestly.

"No, not in your hearts. I must prove my faith. Help me. What can I do to show my sincerity? Tell me your plans with regard to Mr. Curtis, and let me help you to perfect them; I will so willingly do anything."

Lord Robert hesitated.

"You see, you do not trust me," she said sadly.

"I do, madam," he answered slowly; "I will prove it, for I think you can help. We must seize this man, it has become an absolute necessity. We must entice him at night into the house in Peter's Wynd. Do you know any bait likely to draw him?"

Adelaide wrinkled her brows. "No," she said slowly, "none save——"

"None save that which we cannot use without your sister's permission," he said, interpreting her thoughts.

She nodded. "We shall not win that permission; and, indeed, I would not have her drawn into the affair. But there must be some other lure. I—I will speak with him to-night at Lady Westerby's ball. Surely I will learn his desires and find some way to draw him. Let this be my work, to prove my loyalty."

He looked at her curiously. "You would do this, madam?"

"Yes, willingly," she answered. Then she stopped with a quick intake of her breath. "Ah! but you will not kill him?" she asked.

"We want the papers, madam—no more," he answered ambiguously. She was satisfied and asked no more.

"Adelaide, have you seen the china in Mr. Hall's shop in the High street?" asked Lucy de Putren at her elbow. "Celia and I are bound thither. Do come with us and help in my choice."

The company was already dispersing. The three ladies turned out into the Grove and bent their steps toward the old shop at the top of the High street.

Now it chanced that Mr. Hall had business at the Guildhall that morning. His apprentice had played truant to go a-fishing, so he had prevailed upon his lodger, a rare connoisseur in china, to take his place in the shop.

When the three ladies entered the shop, the lodger was critically examining an old piece of Venetian glass, and was so engrossed with its virtues that he entirely forgot his post as salesman. When recalled to his duties by Adelaide, he flung himself eagerly into the work of displaying the wares, but mingled so much frank criticism with his valuation that the customers eyed him with amazed amusement.

“Methinks you are a better connoisseur than merchant, Mr. ——”

“Smith, madam. Josiah Smith, at your service,” said the man, bowing humbly.

“Lud! Mr. Smith, if you give all your customers such frank advice,” continued Adelaide, laughing, “there is, I fear, much of your stock likely to lack purchasers.”

Josiah looked distressed. “Indeed, madam, Mr. Hall has a most rare collection of modern ware, well deserving your notice. But for antique——” he stopped with a shrug of his shoulders.

“You have a poor opinion of its value? Pray, why do you stock it?” asked Lucy de Putren.

“This is not my shop, milady,” explained Josiah hurriedly, “I am but obliging Mr. Hall for an hour this morning.”

“But this vase,” said Adelaide, pointing to a piece of Venetian glass, “this is beautiful and rare of a surety.”

“Well enough, well enough,” he answered tolerantly, “but I could show you one in the city ten times its value, madam, and purchasable for half the price.”

“Lud! I must see this rarity. Where is it?”

“In a potter’s shop in Boat-Stall Lane, milady, hard by the east gate, barely three minutes’ walk from here. If you wish it, I will go there with your ladyship, and see that the potter—who is but a Jew—asks the same price as he wished me to pay him.”

“I should be monstrously obleeged. But may you leave your shop unattended?”

“I will ask the neighbour to send his ’prentice in for a few minutes,” said Josiah, with all a true connoisseur’s eagerness to see a treasure find worthy purchaser. The appren-

tice was called, and the three ladies turned down Boat-Stall Lane, with Josiah walking humbly beside them in the gutter.

“Laidie, you are crazed on your glass,” laughed Celia, “you will ruin poor Tracy with your vagaries.”

“For my part I warrant you will find your purchase less of a rarity than your guide,” laughed Lucy; “he is an eccentric.”

As they passed the end of Peter’s Wynd, the passage leading down into Cock Alley, Celia’s eyes were caught by the name on the brown door. She stopped.

“Lucy, here is the coiffeuse of whom Lady Esdaile spoke. I would gladly try her skill. Our new maid has the fingers of a milkmaid. What do you say? Shall we leave Laidie to visit her potter and call on Madame Grieve?”

“Willingly,” cried Lucy, “I am curious to see the woman.”

Adelaide looked at them nervously. “You little vanity, Celia!” she cried. “Be content as you are and come and help me choose my glass.”

“No, Laidie, I would liefer wait here,” objected Celia. “We have not overmuch time to spare, and I warrant you will be an hour at least among your pots and pans. Come to us at Madame Grieve’s when you have made your purchase.”

Adelaide, fearing to rouse suspicion, made no further objection, and indeed there was nothing to fear from the visit. Many of her acquaintances were regular clients of Madame Grieve. Celia and Lucy turned down toward the brown doorway, and she went on to the potter’s shop with Josiah.

As Celia had prophesied, when Adelaide found herself among curios, time and money lost all value for her. She made many purchases under Josiah’s guidance, and full

half an hour elapsed before she emerged with him from the dark little shop and parted from him in the doorway.

"Do you hasten back to your duties, Mr. Smith," she urged. "I will rejoin my friends. I fear I have detained you a monstrous long time."

"Indeed, madam, 'tis a joy to meet a lady with such a rare taste in china. But now, if your ladyship can spare me, I will run back and see how Mr. Hall's business fares."

"Do so, and accept my grateful thanks," said Adelaide, dismissing him with a wave of her hand.

Josiah hurried along Boat-Stall Lane, and disappeared round the corner, while Adelaide strolled slowly after him and turned into Peter's Wynd.

But their parting had been witnessed by a pair of amazed eyes. Timothy Curtis, coming out of the Mews by the east gate, was just in time to see the couple emerge from the dark shop. He recognised them both, and the sight of these two, so inexplicably met in eager conversation, put the final point to his assurance of Adelaide's espionage. Without doubt she was the other assistant of Lord Pelham, whose name Josiah had so loyally refused to divulge.

Timothy resolved to lose no time in facing her with the accusation of guilt and pleading with her to clear him at least in her sister's eyes. And of late a new plague had come to torture him, the pangs of jealousy. While Celia moved in a crowd of suitors and smiled upon all alike, or reserved her special favours for boys like Peter Pemberton, Timothy had no fears, but of late it had been noticeable that Charles Rathborne enjoyed an especial amount of her confidence. He was seldom absent from her side, and Tim lived in constant dread lest the slender chain by which he

held her love snap asunder, and she grow weary of trusting one whom all the world else held contemptible.

For he did not know that a woman's love, once won, can never wholly die, though she strive with all her power to drive its memory from her heart.

There was another and less vital consideration that urged Tim to bring affairs to a crisis. His creditors had relaxed their pressure since his uncle's arrival on the scene, but he was very hard pressed for money, and his application to Lord Westerby brought but scant assistance.

"You're demmed extravagant, my boy," said his lordship sternly. "Do you eat money? Eh! What!"

"I don't fling it as wide as you did, sir, I'll warrant," answered Tim coolly.

The old man's eyes twinkled at sportive recollections. "Gad! it's a costly world," he sighed. "We pay the full price for all our pleasures, whether it be in gold, gout, or demme! nephews. But for this present matter—mend your own fortunes, Timothy. Here's Dorothy Smallshaw at hand to help you."

Tim shook his head. "She doesn't want me, sir."

"Woo her, woo her, boy. If you've an ounce of the old stock in you, you should know the way."

"I will not. She would make a man a merry wife, I grant you, but I'd as lief be permitted to be serious on occasion."

Lord Westerby eyed him shrewdly. "Your taste is a trifle too cultured, my boy. But I don't blame you. I am with you in esteeming the pearl a purer gem than the brilliant. So look you, Tim: woo this pearl, this moon among stars, and when you win her, I'll pay the price of your success."

Timothy turned away without speaking. His uncle followed and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Tim, have you forgot that you own a sword?" he asked.

Tim shook his head. "A string of pinked throats will not convince a woman," he said despondently.

"Maybe not, but 'twill teach her you are to be feared, and that is the first step to love, with most of 'em."

So Timothy resolved to play his stake with Adelaide, and awaited her arrival at his aunt's ball with desperate determination to force her to an interview.

To his surprise the task was not difficult. He approached her side in confident expectation of a rebuff, but she yielded at once to his petition for her hand in the dance, and when the minuet was over suffered him to lead her out into the quiet garden. He was astonished, but supposed she had thought over his threat of the previous day, and had resolved that her wisest course would be to hear him.

When he was alone with her at last, he found an unexpected difficulty in broaching the subject, and conscious that he had not much time at his disposal, wasted some minutes in awkward silence. He was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to notice a like hesitation in Adelaide's manner.

At last, as is ever the way with one who seeks a delicate opening for a subject, he lost patience with diplomacy and plunged headlong into the matter.

"Lady Wimbourne," he began bluntly, "I have discovered the secret of your midnight meeting at Avington. I know what you have undertaken, and unless you will yourself clear me of this charge you have trumped up against me, Tracy must learn the truth."

He was prepared for some emotion upon Adelaide's part,

but not for the face of blank astonishment she turned to him at his words.

“Mr. Curtis,” she cried, “I fail to comprehend a word of your speech. That you overheard the object of my meeting with Captain McFee I have long understood—to my sorrow; but for the rest—what, pray, have I undertaken, and what must Tracy learn?”

“The name of the thief who stole his papers, madam,” said Tim sternly, angered by what he judged her ready dissimulation.

“I thought you were aware, Mr. Curtis, that Tracy has already learned that name,” she answered coldly.

“I’m aware, madam, you’ve trumped up an absurd accusation against me,” answered Tim irritably—“an accusation which I must insist upon your withdrawing.”

“Really, sir, you are amazing,” said Adelaide sharply. “Why should I withdraw what I believe to be true?”

“Because you have no such belief. Because you know better than any my innocence. Ah! Lady Wimbourne,” he broke out entreatingly, “be reasonable. Believe me, I have no will to harm you. Prove me but honest in Celia’s eyes, and I swear the rest of the world shall never learn from me of your—your mistaken zeal for King George.”

“King George!” she echoed blankly. “Faith! Mr. Curtis, I can’t follow you.”

Tim lost his temper. “Do you wish me to be more explicit, madam?” he asked sharply.

“I’d be monstrous obleeged if you would give me some clue to your meaning,” she answered scornfully.

“Then listen, madam. The papers Tracy committed to your keeping you yourself have stolen, delivering them over to a stranger at dawning at Avington. You are in

the pay of Lord Pelham to watch the Jacobites, and in order to clear yourself from suspicion, you have blackened me in the eyes of all my friends. Is that sufficiently explicit, madam?"

Adelaide stopped dead in the middle of the walk and turned deliberately to face him. "Upon my soul! Mr. Curtis," she gasped; "upon my soul!" She broke into a little laugh which she checked as quickly. "But you are insolent, sir," she said haughtily. "Your explanation is as impertinent as it is absurd."

"Nevertheless, madam, I have proofs of its truth."

"Proofs? What are they, pray?"

"Your meeting with this stranger at Avington. Your accusation against myself. Your letter of warning. Finally, your talk this very morning with Lord Pelham's second spy."

Adelaide flushed. "'Tis unreasonable I should defend myself to you, but I will be just and do so. Know, then, I wrote no letter of warning, I spoke with no spy, and for the stranger—he was none other than the Jacobite envoy who intrusted the papers to my keeping. Of the truth of this Tracy will assure you, if you choose to broach the subject to my husband. In truth, Mr. Curtis," she added, with a scornful smile, "I do not wonder you wished to spare Tracy knowledge of my doings."

Tim was staggered: all his carefully built up evidence tumbled to the ground. "But—but Josiah Smith?" he gasped helplessly. "You were with him this morning?"

"Josiah Smith? Ah! my guide to the purchase of old china. Is he a spy? It seems you have a greater acquaintance with the breed than I, Mr. Curtis."

Timothy stood silent. He was inexpressibly relieved to

find his suspicions unfounded, but utterly at a loss to know where to found new ones. Adelaide eyed him quizzically.

"Your accusation, Mr. Curtis, was founded on very slender proofs," she said.

"No more slender than those you hold against me, madam?" he answered testily.

Adelaide started. "I wonder—" she muttered. "No, no, Mr. Curtis, even without our knowledge that Lord Pelham bought your services, we could prove you guilty. For none save you knew I held the papers. On your own showing you saw Captain McFee give them into my hands."

"I did nothing of the kind. And if I had, what then? How do you claim I took them?"

"By the simple expedient, Mr. Curtis, of bribing my maid."

"Your maid? Martha? Does she accuse me? Where is she? Heavens! I'll drag the truth out of her if I have to scare her witless first. Where is she?"

"You should know best. She ran away after doing your work. I have no trace of her."

"If she knows the truth I'll find her, if it cost me my life," he muttered savagely. "The lying minx!"

Adelaide started. "Ah-h!" she said thoughtfully. She gave a little gasp of excitement; here was the lure she sought.

"Mr. Curtis," she said slowly, "you pretend innocence, but it seems to me you do protest too much. Yet, if you can find this girl and draw the truth from her, 'twould be the surest proof of your honesty."

Tim listened eagerly. "You can give me no clue, madam?"

Adelaide hesitated. "I believe she is still in Bath. She had relatives here. I will inquire among my servants, and

if I can find trace of her whereabouts I will let you know."

"Lady Wimbourne, I'm grateful. And in the meantime——?"

"In the meantime, Mr. Curtis, I hold to my former opinion, and beg that you will not further weary me with your accusations. Now take me back to the house."

In the brightly lighted house the gay company were doing their utmost to atone for their previous day's depression. There was no lack of liveliness at Lady Westerby's ball. Perhaps Miss Smallshaw infected the guests with her own spirit, for revelry ran high, and more than once the stately hostess lifted her eyebrows at an unconventional levity that, in her opinion, would better have graced a tavern kitchen than the floor of a lady's drawing-room.

"'Twas vastly different in my young days, Tim," she said to her nephew under her breath. "For pity's sake go and silence that child Dorothy. She's the best-hearted giri in England, but as rattle-brained as—as your friend Mr. Winnington. In my day, a few subjects were still held sacred, but our wit did not halt for lack of them. But nowadays——" she shrugged her shoulders expressively. "The world goes so fast, Tim, that it has no choice left it save to grow shallow, shallow, shallow. Go talk to Dorothy."

Timothy reluctantly crossed the room to the girl's side. She greeted him with a bright glance of pleasure.

"Here comes Mr. Curtis, the crystal-gazer," she cried saucily. "Have you again been studying the mysteries of the glass?"

"Yes, madam," he answered, eyeing her coolly.

"Lud! You're persistent. And what said the oracle?"

"Faith! that when a woman looks out of a window, 'tis like enough a man is at her back."

Dorothy started. "A man? What manner of a man?"

"One, madam, who would liefer greet her in the darkness than walk with her in the light," he answered, with a significant smile, and bowing, walked away.

His interruption effectually silenced Dorothy's chatter; she stared after him in amazement.

"What is his meaning now?" she gasped.

"Don't seek to fathom it, madam," said Sir Simon. "'Tis well known he's been crazed this sennight past."

"Crazed! What ails him?"

"He has been moonstruck," laughed Sir Simon.

Rory frowned. He stooped over Dorothy. "Shall we after him, madam, and make him expound his meaning?"

She looked up at him questioningly, then gave him her hand, and together they walked through the room.

"I have had the most pestilential lecture from Tracy Wimbourne," said Rory pathetically. "Concerning yourself, madam."

"Lud! A monstrous pleasing subject; what saith Sir Tracy?"

"He blames my free confidence and your ready tongue."

"He need have small fears. In a blind world a one-eyed man is king—these bats look for no meaning in my words. For your confidences—am I not one of the band?"

"You are, and Tracy is mightily grateful for your subscriptions, but he would have you take his use of them on trust."

She laughed. "Lud! He's monstrous prudent."

"A man with one foot on the scaffold is like to be."

"Does he know of my visits to the house?"

"Gad! no, madam. Tracy's tongue once loosed is plaguy unpleasant."

She grimaced. "I vow he is selfish. Am I to have all the expense of conspiracy and none of its pleasures? I shall lodge a complaint when his Highness arrives."

They passed out into the garden. Rory stooped and looked questioningly into her face. "Lady mine," he said coolly, "I can find it in my heart to be jealous."

She gave a soft laugh of pleasure. "Jealous! Of whom? Of the Prince?"

"Faith! No. Of the look in your eyes when they greet Timothy Curtis."

She flushed. "He is an honest man, Mr. Winnington."

"The breed is not so rare, madam. Is it for that you love him?"

"Love? Who spoke of love? I think I fear him."

"Yet fear begets admiration and admiration love. I am jealous."

Again she gave her soft glad laugh. "Admiration begets love? Not with women! 'Tis a well-known fact that the blackest-hearted vagabonds win the most loving wives."

Rory laughed. "If I cry myself vagabond, madam, will you——?"

"Will I believe it?" she interrupted, laughing. "'Twould not be difficult. But a vagabond should, at least, have the grace to pretend honesty."

"Yet to win his wife——"

"What? Would you deny honour for a woman? For one woman?"

"Honour!" he laughed grimly. "A bubble, madam, swollen with the breath of centuries of talkers. I grant you it wears well enough in the sunshine, but comes the rain, blows the tempest, and your bubble bursts."

"You do indeed cry yourself scoundrel, Mr. Winnington," she said with a frown.

Rory winced. "I have seen the world, madam. But I'm not too old to be convinced. Perchance if the sun sent rays to enlighten me, I might yet learn to blow my bubble as blithely as the rest."

Dorothy laughed softly. "The sun, Mr. Winnington, must spread his rays, not devote all to the lighting of one path, however dark it be. But we grow serious, sir, a crime of which you are not often guilty. Let us go in. There is the music of the country dance."

Timothy wandered through the rooms, doing his duty as host. He found much matter for amusement in thus courteously entertaining men who were seeking by every means in their power to entrap him to a prison. He passed on, and in the last room, in a retired alcove, he discovered Celia and Sir Peter Pemberton.

A sudden madness seized him, a bitter jealousy that all others should have the right to woo her and he must stand aside and watch her won. He would not endure it without one more plea. He hurried back through the crowded rooms until he discovered Lucy de Putren.

"Madam," he pleaded, "will you be pitiful and give your aid to a man most intolerably abused?"

"What is it, Mr. Curtis?" she asked good-humouredly. Lucy de Putren had a tender place in her heart for Tim Curtis.

"Sir Peter Pemberton at present monopolises Miss Winnington."

She eyed him sharply. "You would speak with her alone? But can you deem Celia wished it, Mr. Curtis?"

He winced. "Give me but the opportunity to learn her

will," he pleaded. "If she does not wish my company she has but to say so."

Lucy nodded. "True. Celia, methinks, can speak her mind on occasion as plainly as most women. If you are resolved to risk another—rebuff, you shall have the occasion."

She suffered him to lead her back to the distant room where Celia and Sir Peter were chattering gaily, and together they penetrated into the alcove and stood before the absorbed couple.

"Sir Peter, I am here to beg a boon," began Lucy de Putren brightly.

"A boon, madam?" cried Peter, springing to his feet.

"You swore you would show me the new Dutch step in the country dance. The music is but now beginning; will you not keep your word?"

"Willingly, madam," answered Peter with some embarrassment, "if Miss Winnington will pardon my desertion."

"I will come and watch you," said Celia, rising, "and take my lesson, too, in terpsichorean wiles."

"Do," said Lucy quickly. "Mr. Curtis will conduct you. Come, Sir Peter, or we shall lose our places."

Laughing mischievously to herself at her unseemly haste, she gave her hand to Peter and almost dragged him from the room, leaving Celia staring after them in amazement.

When they had disappeared Celia turned stiffly to Timothy.

"Will you take me to the ball room, sir?" she asked coldly.

He did not move. "If you command it, madam, I must. But do not so command. Stay here but a little and let me speak to you."

Celia seated herself stiffly. "What have you to say?" she asked sharply. Her face was cold, unmoved, but her hands

trembled, and her white fingers twisted themselves nervously together. He noted this and took courage.

"Mistress Celia," he pleaded, "I have a boon to ask."

"What is it?" she asked coldly.

He shook his head with a smile. "Nay, madam, how can I speak to one so cold and distant? In older days when subjects would approach their sovereigns to urge a plea, they awaited a sign permitting audience. Without that sign I dare not speak. Will you not lower the sceptre of your disdain and let me draw nearer your throne?"

For a moment Celia hesitated, then, as though almost against her will, she drew in her skirts and made place for him on the seat at her side.

"I will listen to your plea," she said quietly.

He did not seat himself beside her, but stood leaning against the wall opposite, looking down at her bent head. "Mistress Celia, it is but a plea for a place, however small, in your thoughts. A plea, dear Moon, that when you sail the heavens in your glory with all the planets in your train, and gladden all men with your beauty, you will remember there is one man upon the earth whose nights are always dark."

"Are they so dark?" she asked quickly, and there was jealousy in her tone.

He met her eyes and smiled. "So dark, madam, that he has not even eyes to see what other men hold fair."

"But what is the boon you ask?" she muttered hurriedly.

"Only remembrance, madam. When others draw near to your side, touch your hand, tell of their love, ah! Mistress Celia, remember there is one who loves you more than all the world loves you—not for your beauty, not for your brilliance, not because you are the toast of Bath, but be-

cause he has looked into your soul and read its purity. Others may look in your eyes, but he must turn away; others may speak their homage, but he must keep silent. All the day and all the night his thoughts are yours, madam; will you not give him in return the little boon he asks? Will you not remember?"

She lifted to him eyes dark with tears.

"Remember—" she whispered softly, "ah! I strive day and night to forget—but, Heaven pity me—I cannot."

"Would you forget, Mistress Celia?" he asked; and he stooped and looked into her eyes.

She looked up with a pathetic little smile of helplessness. "No," she said slowly, "I would not. Spy though you be, dishonoured though you be, I think you love me, and surely love, if it be honest, can never bring shame. I cannot love you, I cannot trust you——"

"I ask neither, madam—as yet. Only that you will remember."

Tracy appeared round the end of the screen in front of the alcove.

"Mr. Curtis," he said shortly, "Lord Westerby seeks you."

Timothy rose. He took her hand and kissed it, and bowing quietly to Tracy, walked out of the room.

Celia turned to her brother-in-law and laid her hands on his arm.

"Tracy," she said earnestly, "tell me here and now on what foundation rests your proof against Mr. Curtis."

He looked down at her pityingly. "Celia, has it come to that?" he asked.

She nodded. "I must know all, Tracy. You say he stole the papers from Laidie. How did he get them?"

"By bribing Martha."

"Has she confessed to it?"

"She has disappeared. We can find no trace of her. But we have other, stronger proofs, Celia."

She shook her head. "I will not believe it, Tracy. No man could look so, speak so, and have a soul so black."

"You don't know men, dear. Words come easily, especially when love-inspired. And I do not doubt that he loves you."

"How could he love and deceive?"

"Love has driven men to dishonour before this, Celia."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears. "Tracy," she cried, 'give me but proofs that I may know him innocent or guilty, and love him or put him out of my heart forever."

"Proofs? What more proofs do you need?"

"I do not know. Find Martha; let us learn her story. Bring him face to face with her and I will believe. Ah! Tracy, do this for me, and do not be angry with me that I still distrust."

"I will, Celia. We'll scour the kingdom for the girl and force her to the truth. Will that satisfy you?"

She gave him her hand gratefully and they went back to rejoin the dancers. Tracy thought of the note of warning to Timothy in his pocket, but he forbore to tax her with it.

"Poor child," he muttered. "She has enough to bear now. She is breaking her heart for Timothy Curtis, who's not worthy to touch her hand. Truly there's matter for marvel in the doings of Providence—and a woman's heart."

CHAPTER XV

BEHIND THE BROWN DOOR

THE following morning Timothy Curtis commenced his search for Martha Williams, Lady Wimbourne's maid. He consulted his landlady, Mrs. Buzzard, about all possible lodgings the girl might have occupied, and visited them with inquiries. He despatched Simon to draw the likely covers in the neighbourhood of Cock Alley where he had seen her the week before. He inquired at the coach office and sought council of the watch, but with no result. He could find no trace of her whereabouts, though he sought her eagerly for the space of two days. He would have employed the town crier, but feared to scare her into closer hiding.

But the afternoon of the second day, light dawned. On returning to his rooms after an unavailing search through the lower part of the town, he found awaiting him a note from Adelaide Wimbourne. He recognised the seal and paper at once, and opened it eagerly.

"I learn from my cook-maid, that Martha Williams is to be heard of at the house of one Madame Grieve, a coiffeuse. A. W."

That was all; it was curt indeed, in its brevity, but it sufficed for Timothy. He picked up his hat and hurried down into the street, round to the house in Peter's Wynd. His suspicions concerning the character of the house were confirmed; he marvelled that he had not thought earlier of inquiring there.

An elderly Frenchwoman answered his summons at the door. She seemed puzzled at his appearance there, and as she spoke English with an execrable accent, and understood but little of what he said, it was some time before he could make clear to her the object of his inquiries.

When at length she understood, she proved incapable of assisting him.

It was true, she said, many young girls came to the house; the one he sought might be among them. Assuredly, Madame Grieve would know.

“May I speak to madame, then?” asked Tim, eager to force an entry.

The woman looked horrified. “Mais, monsieur!” she cried; “monsieur ne doit pas entrer. Gentlemen—zey do not come in. Ze ladies—it is not conformable, vous comprenez? Ze house is for ze coiffure.”

“Then ask Madame Grieve to do me the honour to speak with me here,” he asked impatiently.

The woman shut the door on him and went away. Timothy waited impatiently. Presently the door was reopened, and Madame Grieve herself appeared upon the step.

“Your pardon, madame,” said Tim gallantly, “I fear I have disturbed you. I am in search of a girl named Martha Williams, and was directed to inquire for her here.”

Madame Grieve eyed him curiously with her bright, black eyes.

“To be sure, monsieur, I know the girl, but she is not here now,” she said, smiling. “I am sorry for monsieur’s disappointment.”

“Can you not tell me where she lodges?” he asked eagerly.

Madame Grieve shook her head. “I am *désolée*, monsieur, I do not know, but I will inquire. Only—for the

moment I am engaged. Monsieur will doubtless understand. I cannot keep a lady waiting in the middle of the coiffure. Will monsieur call again?"

"Willingly, madame. I am monstrosly grateful to you for your kindness. At what hour shall I call?"

She hesitated. "At six o'clock I go to my supper. I will make inquiries then. If monsieur will call here about nine o'clock I will have the girl to receive him, or at least news of her."

"But, madame, I fear I put you to trouble," said Tim. "Can not you tell me where to find the girl myself?"

She shook her head. "You would not find her, monsieur," she laughed. "But come here at nine to-night and you shall see her. You will excuse me, monsieur, I cannot keep my customer waiting longer. Au revoir."

She shut the door in his face and Timothy returned to his rooms in no very satisfied frame of mind. His hand was almost on his quarry, but he was nervous; he had no proof that the house had any connection with the Jacobite conspirators. Indeed, it seemed to him that he held proof to the contrary. But Josiah's assurance troubled his memory. He liked neither the house nor the hour fixed for the meeting.

He dined alone at the open window, watching the door opposite and the roof alternately. The blind walls stared back at him blankly; what secret did they hide behind their stones? He thought, with a shiver, if his enemies wished to trap him they were never likely to have a better opportunity than that night in the lonely house. Surely he was a fool to give a chance to men who would lose no chances.

He sat down to write a note to Madame Grieve, repudiating the engagement, and bidding the girl wait upon him

elsewhere ; but shame at his timidity stopped him. If he did not meet the girl to-night, he would probably lose her ; it was not likely that she would willingly put herself in the power of the man she had slandered if she were aware of his identity, and he could not expect Madame Grieve to trouble herself to arrange another interview. To find the girl was his first step toward clearing his reputation, and should he shrink from risk in the search, he deserved to lose her altogether.

He was ashamed of his cowardice. He put on his wide-brimmed hat and long coat, and buckling on his sword sat down again at the window to await the appointed hour.

The blind walls frowned across at him. He began to recall stories of silent murders behind such dark stone walls, of men secretly done to death in corners of deserted houses. He grew afraid and angry at his fears. He rose once, and priming a pistol slipped it into his pocket. He considered the advisability of taking Simon with him, but dismissed it contemptuously.

“Pish !” he muttered angrily, “I’ve no more nerve than a boggart-scared plough-boy. What should harm me? I’m in Bath, in the eighteenth century, not in Venice under the Ten. I’m armed. What the plague should make me so demmed jumpy?”

He pulled out his pistol defiantly, and threw it on the table, and so, alternating between bravado and fear, he waited for the hour to come.

At last, about a quarter to nine, he heard steps in the passage below and looking out saw Madame Grieve, followed by a woman heavily shawled. They opened the brown door and entered the house opposite. With a final laugh at his fears, he rose to follow her.

At the door he paused, and drew from his inner pocket the bracelet Celia had given him.

"I'll not take this," he muttered, "into such a place. Who knows with what wooing I must win the girl? I'll not take this."

He locked it in his bureau, and bidding Simon wait up for his return, passed out into the darkening street.

Peter's Wynd was almost in darkness. He paused for a moment with his hand on the knocker of the brown door and looked back at his open window opposite.

"The mouse is nibbling," he muttered whimsically, "will the trap close?"

Then he laughed again at his nervousness and lifted the knocker.

The door was opened a little way and Madame Grieve peered round the chink. "Is that you, monsieur?" she asked softly. "The girl is here."

She opened the door a little wider and Timothy crossed the threshold. The door shut behind him with a bang, and he found himself in darkness.

Timothy stood still, with his hand on his half-drawn sword. He had a queer, uncanny feeling that eyes were peering at him through the darkness, and figures stealing past him.

"Have you no light?" he asked irritably, and he stepped back and felt for the latch of the door.

"This way, monsieur," said Madame Grieve, taking his hand. "Let me direct you. The draught has blown out the candle."

Timothy stumbled forward a few steps and then stopped dead. He felt a sharp prick at his throat, and putting up his hand touched cold steel. At the same moment, a door

at the end of the hall was opened and the place was flooded with light.

The hall was full of men surrounding him. In front stood Marcus Ormonde with raised blade, smiling into his eyes.

"Caught at last, Mr. Curtis!" he said. "Faith, you are an easy man to gull."

"Damnation!" cried Tim savagely. He turned and bowed elaborately to Madame Grieve. "Your pardon, madame; one does not expect the presence of ladies on such an occasion."

The little Frenchwoman clapped her hands. "Ah! monsieur is still gallant. Ah, ha! Monsieur, bright eyes lead men far astray. Bon soir. I leave you to—your swears."

She dropped him a curtsy and disappeared up the stairway.

"And now to business," said Ormonde shortly. "You'll understand, Curtis, the slightest noise on your part will be—er—effectually silenced. Take his sword and tie his hands, Lee. He sha'n't slip us again."

"Is it to be Paris then?" asked Tim, with a resigned shrug.

"No, Mr. Curtis, a longer journey," answered Lee grimly.

Timothy's heart gave a leap of fear; with a sudden effort he threw off his captors and sprang toward the door. A dozen hands seized him. He was overpowered in a moment. His hands were tied and he was dragged up the stairs.

Rory met them on the landing. He shook his head reproachfully at Tim.

"That demmed inquisitive nose of yours, Tim! I knew it would lead you astray some day. But I never dreamed you'd be so bedad easily gulled."

In the large upper room Lord Robert Dacre sat talking

with three or four of the Jacobites. Tracy was not present. They looked up at Tim's entrance and smiled.

"Trapped, eh, Mr. Curtis?" said Lord Robert. "A trifle too trusting this time, it seems. Has the ass forgotten the taste o' the whip?"

"What d'ye want with me?" asked Tim sullenly. "I've told you I'm innocent of any interference with your affairs. I can't do more than give you my word."

"That is unfortunate," sneered Lord Stavely, "the word of a spy being of no great value."

"I'm no spy," cried Tim angrily, "I have told you so a dozen times. I fail to understand what reason you have for believing it."

"Lord Pelham has told Sir Thomas Winnington that you are in his pay to watch the Jacobites," said Lord Robert shortly.

Tim stared aghast. "Pelham said that?" he gasped. "Egad! I knew he was a blackguard, but he takes a mighty strong revenge for being told so."

Lord Robert rose impatiently. "Search him," he said shortly. Tim sullenly submitted to the inevitable; he knew they would find nothing.

Roger Lee and Lord Stavely subjected him to a careful search while the others watched.

"No; he has not the papers on him," said Stavely at last. "Where the plague does he hide them?"

Lord Robert crossed to Timothy and faced him menacingly.

"Now, Curtis," he said sharply, "we're not playing a game with you. Where are those papers?"

"I haven't got them," said Tim irritably.

"Have you already sold them?"

"No."

"Then where are they?"

"How the devil should I know?"

Lord Robert turned away with a muttered oath of impatience. He drew two or three of the men apart and they talked in low voices. Tim grew hot and cold by turns. His hands were damp and clammy and his heart beat quickly. He turned his eyes from side to side in search of a possible way of escape, of one friendly face among the crowd.

Presently Lord Robert came back to his side.

"You do not appear to understand, Mr. Curtis, that this is a case of our necks or yours. You won't tell us where these papers are?"

"I can tell you nothing about them," snapped Tim angrily.

"Then you must take the consequences."

"What are you going to do to me?" he asked indifferently.

"The most popular suggestion is to hang you out of hand," answered Lord Robert coolly.

"Hang me! Nonsense! I tell you I have done you no injury."

"We don't believe you."

"Then you're demmed ungentlemanly," shouted Tim savagely. "Hang me! Give me a sword and I'll fight any two of you left-handed."

Lord Robert shook his head impatiently. "This is no tavern brawl. You are judged and condemned. And you will be so good as to moderate your tones, Mr. Curtis, or we shall be put to the disagreeable necessity of running you through on the spot."

For a moment Tim stood silent, facing the row of resolute

faces; then pride conquered his fears. He shrugged his shoulders indifferently and smiled at them defiantly.

"Very well," he said coolly, "hang me, if you will. 'Tis a demmed ungentlemanly way of kicking off this planet, but it seems I've wandered into Bedlam, so I must take the consequences. Give me a few minutes to prepare myself and I'm ready for my last dance."

Rory sat on the table swinging his legs and watching Tim critically. He drew out his pipe and lighted it.

"The man is innocent, Bob," he said. "I'd go surety for it anywhere."

David Beringer looked round at him eagerly. "How do you know?" he asked quickly. "Have you any proof?"

"No," said Rory cheerfully, "I've no proof. But he couldn't be a spy, he's such a demmed fool."

Lord Robert shrugged his shoulders. "Is that all you have to urge?" he asked contemptuously.

"No," said Rory, puffing at his pipe. "Give him another chance now you've shown him the halter. If he will tell where the papers are now, prove him a knave and let him go free; but if he will rather hang, why prove him a fool and hang him."

Lord Robert turned to Tim. "You hear him, Curtis. The noose is round your neck. Tell us where to find those papers and we cut the rope."

A drowning man will clutch at a straw, and a man with his foot on the scaffold steps will stumble to make time. Every moment was precious when so few remained, every chance of delay held hope. Tim's wits worked quickly. He could gain a few minutes by sending some of the men on a wild-goose chase to his rooms, and when they returned, even if no help intervened, his position would be no worse.

He assumed a sulky air and gave in with well-simulated reluctance. "Go to my rooms and get them then," he said sullenly.

"Where shall we find them?"

"In a square tin box hidden behind my bed," he said slowly, "there you'll find all the treasonable correspondence I possess. My man knows which it is."

Lord Robert eyed him suspiciously. "He is tricking us, I believe, Marcus," he said.

"What matter?" answered Ormonde shortly. "We have him safe here. Stavely and I will go over to his lodging and search."

"You will want a line in his hand to his man to let you in," suggested Lee.

"Mr. Curtis will supply it," said Lord Robert; "loose his right hand, Lee."

Paper and inkhorn were on the table. Tim picked up the quill and scrawled a line to Simon:

"Rouse the town and tell Lord Westerby I'm held prisoner by Jacobites in the house of Madame Grieve."

He folded the paper and tossed it to Ormonde. It was a desperate chance and it failed. Ormonde slowly unfolded and read the slip. He looked across at Tim and smiled reproachfully.

"Really, Mr. Curtis," he said, "you underrate our intelligence."

Tim laughed grimly. "I apologise, gentlemen; 'twas a slender hope, but any log in a shipwreck."

He rewrote the note under dictation, and the two men prepared to depart. Rory rose to his feet.

"I go surety, Bob, the man is innocent; therefore it's not to be doubted he'll hang; but I tell you plainly I've no

stomach for the work, so I'll leave you to it. Good-bye, Tim. Commend me to Diogenes if you meet him on the further side Styx." He strolled to the door and then paused, but did not turn his head. "If you are bent on hanging, demme! do it in a gentlemanly fashion. Let the poor beggar have a few minutes to himself first."

He went out, followed by Stavely and Ormonde.

There was an awkward silence. Tim stood staring at the floor, desperately racking his brains for another expedient to try, when the searchers returned empty-handed. The men shifted their positions in embarrassed restlessness.

Oliver Shirley leaned over to Lord Robert.

"Gag him and put him in the next room, Bob," he urged. "And let us get on with the business. We'll be here all night."

"As you please," said Lord Robert indifferently.

Lee produced a scarf, and wound it round Timothy's mouth. The latter raised no objection, it was of small moment to him what they did. Lord Robert tested the cords that bound his wrists, and opening a door at the end of the room motioned to him to pass through. Tim strolled through into the inner room and the door was shut upon him.

Directly he heard the latch fall he threw up his head and looked round eagerly, then his face fell. He was in a perfectly empty room lighted by a small hanging lamp. Four white walls closed him in, offering no hope of escape. The only door was the one by which he had entered; the only window, set high in the wall, looked sheer down into Boat-Stall Lane, a drop of fifty feet on to the hard cobbled road below.

The lattice was slightly open; he peered out eagerly but

could see little in the gathering darkness. The window was in a small gable; on either side the high roof sloped steeply up a height of eight feet to the ridge of the tiles; there was not so much as a pipe or a gutter to offer foothold on the smooth surface of roof or wall; even were his hands unfettered, escape that way was clearly impossible.

He next tried to bite through his gag that he might shout from the window in the vain hope of attracting attention from the neighbouring houses; but he only succeeded in half choking himself—Lee had done his work too well. He stared once more desperately round the bare room and then recognising the futility of further effort he gave up the struggle and leaning against the wall opposite the darkening window resigned himself to his fate.

He stood face to face with death. His mind groped into the mists of that undiscovered country with the awed wonder of humanity contemplating eternal mysteries. But he had a simple faith in his Maker and conscious that he had held his honour untainted, he did not fear to ask mercy for his many sins. He looked back over his life with a blush for the darker passages, with a sigh of regret for wasted hours. He thought of his friendship for Tracy Wimbourne, that friendship so suddenly, so unaccountably snapped. He felt no emotions of anger toward him; had he been in Tracy's place, he believed that he would have acted in the same way. But he was glad that his friend had not been present that evening. It pleased him to think that Tracy would have no hand in his death.

He raged at the credulity that had led him to be so easily trapped, and he thought with a puzzled wonder of the share Adelaide Wimbourne had taken in his undoing. But he would not dwell on it; the edge of the grave is no place

to harbour revengeful thoughts, least of all against a woman.

Then he let his thoughts wander to Celia. What would she think, he wondered, when she saw him no more? Would she question her brother, and learning the truth, weep a little over his fate? Or would she deem he had but met the punishment he deserved and remember him only in her dreams? He could never now convince her of his honesty. His bitterest thought was this; that he must die still unjustified in her sight, must go out into the darkness, leaving her to believe his love only a shameful hypocrisy. He would fain have spared her that; fain have left her a remembrance scented with sweet rosemary, not with such bitter rue. He had no shadow in his heart for her want of trust in him; it would have been unworthy of her had she given her love to one whose honour was tainted.

A bitter sigh escaped his lips; the thought of Celia made life very sweet in his eyes. She was so warm, so tender, so utterly desirable, and the darkness before him was so cold, so blank.

He lifted his head once more, and looked round the room in a last desperate search for escape, but no hope offered. He stared blankly across at the darkening window, and then stood suddenly rigid with a startled intake of his breath. For even as he looked something darkened the pallid light of the window; he saw a man's leg swing past the pane and disappear.

With two strides he was across the room, staring out into the darkness. He could see nothing, and had almost persuaded himself that he had been mistaken when again the leg appeared. It was a shapely leg, cased in elegant blue silk stockings with silver clocks; the shoes were diamond-

buckled; the knee-breeches gartered with pearl-embroidered straps. It swung down across the window for all the world as though suspended from the clouds.

Timothy gaped at it in blank astonishment. Was some man, madman it would seem, sitting astride on the gable, swinging his legs over that hideous drop into the darkness below? If so, by what magic had he reached such a position?

Timothy's heart beat high with hope and excitement; where one man could come surely another could go. He strained vainly at his bonds in a desperate effort to be free that he might open wider the lattice and lean out to his visitor.

Slowly, tentatively, as though doubting the possibility of the undertaking, the leg swung lower till the diamond buckles were on a level with the bottom of the window. At the top of the window pane appeared an arm and shoulder clad in pale-green satin. The man was evidently hanging on to the point of the gable with his hands and right knee, while his left foot swung loose into the darkness, groping for a resting-place. There was no sill outside the window, not so much as a jagged stone to give foothold. The man inserted his toe in the crack of the open lattice, and felt along the opening for the latch.

Tim struggled madly with his cords; were he but free to open the window, the man's attempt might be successful. The foot groped blindly along the crevice and its example inspired him; he lifted his own foot and kicked at the latch. It gave way; but he could not push open the window while the leg was before it.

There was a soft scrambling sound on the roof, evidently the man was trying to regain his seat astride the gable; twice the leg swung up and slipped down again, dangling

helplessly over the dark abyss. There was the sound of rending cloth and then a low, amused, but somewhat breathless chuckle.

At last, with the third effort, the climber succeeded in regaining his equilibrium; he swung his leg clear of the window and Timothy pushed it open with his head and peered up. He could see nothing; the man was sitting just above him; he drew in his head and waited.

There was a pause. Evidently his rescuer was taking a much-needed breath. Then the soft scrambling on the roof began again. Slowly, cautiously, the man lowered himself down from the gable, his legs swinging over the abyss till they touched the sill; he grasped the window with one hand and swayed outwards for a moment as he let go his hold on the roof; then he gave a little jump forward and landed safely, sitting on the window sill, his feet hanging down into the room.

It was Rory Winnington! His fair hair shone in the pale light from the lamp. He looked across at Tim with a smile of satisfied achievement, and dusted his hands daintily with his lace handkerchief.

"Egad!" he whispered, "the plaguiest risky job I've ever undertaken."

He slipped silently into the room, and drew a clasp-knife from his pocket. He cut loose the scarf across Tim's mouth, but the cords round his wrists he untied carefully.

"We shall need these," he whispered. "It's bedad tricky work up there. Quick now! Lee should be back any moment and I don't gather he will bring much matter with him, eh?"

"Only creditors' accounts," said Tim, with a laugh.

Rory tied a noose in either end of the rope and leaning

far out backward, while Tim held him, he threw one loop round the spike of the gable. The other end of the rope reached half-way between the sill and the point of the gable.

Rory tested it. The spike and noose held firm.

"It will serve," he muttered. "I will go first, Tim, and give you a hand. Heaven grant you've a cool head."

He climbed on to the window sill, steadying himself by Tim's shoulder; then he lifted one foot and put it in the noose and so, hauling himself up the rope, reached the gable, and swung himself astride it. He lowered the rope and waited for Tim to follow, leaning down to give him a steadying hand.

As he did so he noticed that the noose round the gable had frayed with the strain of his weight. He laughed softly.

"Egad! 'twould seem the devil is bent on having him, this way or hanging. It won't stand his weight."

He crooked his knees and one arm round the point of the gable, and swung head downward, reaching out his hand just as Tim put his foot in the noose of the rope.

"Put your weight on my shoulder, Tim," he said; "the rope is giving."

Timothy drew in his breath sharply, but he had no time to think of the depth below. He steadied himself by the top of the window with one foot on the sill and one in the dangling noose. Then with a wild spring he trusted his weight for one second to the rope and clutched at Rory's hand. He got one knee on the top of the window, sharing his weight. He loosed Rory's hand and flung his arm over his shoulder; with another effort he worked his foot to the top of the open lattice, grasped the spike of the gable and stood a moment resting his feet on window and fraying

rope and hanging his weight on his arms while Rory struggled back to an upright position and hauled him up to his side on the gable.

Then the two men looked at each other and laughed triumphantly.

"A hot corner, eh, Tim? I'm thinking they'll seek your mangled corpse in the gutter."

Tim held out his hand. "Thanks, Rory," he said simply. Rory shook the outstretched hand, eyeing him queerly.

"Couldn't let you hang, Tim. You owe me my revenge at écarté. Come along now, we've no time to waste in—er—compliment."

"If the others guess your hand in this——"

"It will be mighty unpleasant," said Rory, grinning, "but they will have no clue to your rescuer. Egad! I was glad to find you alone in the room."

The two men crawled to the end of the gable, where a rope ladder hung from the ridge of the roof. Up this they scrambled and dropped on to the flat tiles on the further side. Rory dragged the ladder up after him.

"Thank your stars we are in time," he gasped breathlessly. "I must put this ladder back before the others miss it. Be off with you, Tim. Straight along the roofs till you are over the 'Cock and Bull' tavern. You'll find the skylight on the right open. Go straight through the house; no one should stop you, but if there are any questions from Rigby tell him 'Geordie has gone over the water'; that will silence him. But should you meet Marcus or Stavely, demme! jump into space rather than let them catch you now."

"Are you not coming, too?"

"Not I," said Rory, crossing to the open trap in the roof.

"I'm going back to watch their faces when they find you flown, and do some monstrous entertaining play-acting."

With a soft laugh he clambered out of sight down the trap and Timothy sped over the roofs in the direction of Cock Alley.

He listened a moment at the skylight, then slipped through into the attic below and hurried out on to the stairs. He paused again to listen and peered down. No one was to be seen, but behind the closed doors he heard the rattling of dice. The familiar sound gave him a feeling of security; he crept down the staircase. At the first landing he stopped with a beating heart; he heard Marcus Ormonde's voice below at the turn of the stairs.

Without a second's delay he turned and hurried down the passage on his left, and opening a door at the end slipped into a room just as two men turned the corner.

The room was in darkness save for the dim light from the window, but he heard the rustle of a woman's dress and a low cry. He held up his hand for silence and stood with his ear to the door, listening to the retreating footsteps of the two men. To his amazement the woman ran across the room to his side and seizing his hand in hers, lifted it to her lips.

"Ah! you've come again as you promised," she whispered. "I was main feared you'd leave me, Mr. Winnington."

Tim stood silent till he heard the men's footsteps die away, then he slipped his hand over her mouth to prevent a scream, and drew her back from the door.

"I'm not Rory Winnington," he said, "but he sent me here."

She wrenched free from his hand. "Sent you here? Won't he come himself? Who are you?"

"Never mind that, I am going now," said Tim, hurriedly fumbling for the latch.

"Stop!" cried the woman. She ran across the room, struck a flint and lighted a candle.

Timothy took two steps toward her.

"Martha!" he gasped. "So I've found you at last, my girl."

She stared at him, her eyes growing wide with fright.

"What do you want with me, Mr. Curtis?" she asked, shrinking back.

Tim stopped. He dared not wait much longer; any moment they might pursue him and find he had not left the tavern. He must not frighten the girl or he would lose her. He held out his hand encouragingly.

"No harm, child," he said coaxingly, "but I want a little of your company, I want a talk with you. Will you come and see me to-morrow? You know where I live."

She eyed him queerly, but seemed in no wise averse to his proposal. "What do you want?" she asked, with a toss of her head.

"You'll come?" he coaxed, drawing nearer. "I want you monstrously, my dear."

She laughed, looking at him with a pleased light in her eyes. "I don't know," she said slowly. "What would folks say, Mr. Curtis?"

"Are we so particular, eh? Well—meet me at—er—Mason's rooms at eleven. 'Tis a convenient place."

"Ay," she said slowly, "convenient enough." She eyed him thoughtfully. "Maybe I'll come, Mr. Curtis," she said, "maybe I won't. I don't know."

"If you do not, I shall come and fetch you," he said, laughing.

She gave a little pleased laugh of vanity. "Do you want me that bad? Then I'll come. I'd as lief show—others—I've more than one string to my bow."

Tim dared stay no longer. "Good girl," he said, patting her cheek. "I shall be waiting for you at eleven o' the clock. Don't fail me." With a parting nod and smile he opened the door and stepped out into the passage.

All was quiet. Without further interruption he sped down the stairs, out into the quiet street.

When he reached the open air he took to his heels and ran the length of Cock Alley, as though all his enemies were in pursuit. He dared not risk Peter's Wynd and the chance of the brown door opening as he passed. He ran till he reached his rooms. Only when at last he found himself in his comfortable lighted chamber and had refreshed his spirit with a glass of wine, did his full courage revive. He looked across at the dark house opposite, and wondered what was happening behind its silent walls.

Five minutes later he heard the door in Peter's Wynd open softly; three men stepped out into the passage. He heard Ormonde's voice.

"If he jumped he is bound to be killed. Why, demme! 'tis a fall of fifty feet."

Tim snatched up a lamp and crossed to the open window. He leaned out with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said. "A fine night for a stroll."

Three faces of blank amazement were lifted to the window. Three low and fervent ejaculations echoed down the silent street.

With a chuckle Tim pulled a curtain across the window and left the three men staring up into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BROKEN BUTTERFLY

IN a small house on the wall, hard by the west gate of the city, Mrs. Juliana Mason, a stout and smiling dame, with a large heart and loose morals, held her abode and offered entertainment to such of the dwellers in the city as hovered only on the outskirts of society and were denied entrance to the more select, but in no wise more reputable, portals of "Simpson's rooms" or "Wiltshire's assemblies."

Mrs. Mason's establishment boasted one large room where coffee and chocolate were served on command, and two small private rooms at the back, with windows looking out over the King's Mead meadows that bordered the Bristol Road.

At the door of this hospitable mansion Timothy waited the following morning, looking eagerly down the narrow street for the approach of Martha Williams. He was mortally afraid that she would suspect his purpose and fail him, but punctual to the hour he saw her trim and showily dressed little figure trip jauntily into sight round the corner, her pretty face wearing a ludicrous expression of complacent vanity. Tim hurried out to meet her, and together they went in and secured a table in one corner of the large coffee-room.

The room already held a goodly complement of visitors: well-to-do tradesfolk; gaily dressed ladies of the demi-monde with their ardent escorts; ladies' maids and gentlemen's gentlemen. Martha sipped her chocolate and looked about her with the pleased wonder of a child at a show, and Timothy watched her with a humorous tolerance, puzzling

his brains how to open his attack on this soulless little atom of humanity.

Martha's attention was much occupied with watching a yellow-haired demoiselle from the theater below the Assembly Rooms.

"Do you think her so pretty, Mr. Curtis?" she asked naïvely.

"I don't know, I am not looking at her," answered Tim, smiling into her blue eyes.

She gave a pleased laugh. "There's many pretty faces in Bath, sir," she said. "They say the new beauty, Miss Smallshaw, is loveliest of all. Do you know her, Mr. Curtis?"

"Oh, yes! I know her well."

"Does Mr. Winnington know her?" she asked slowly.

"Mr. Winnington! Egad! yes," laughed Tim.

She looked up quickly, catching his thought and frowning at the idea his words suggested. "Is she so beautiful?" she asked jealously.

"Some hold her so beautiful that they would give all they possess to win her favour."

She sat a moment silent, then she tossed her head. "My Miss Winnington is more beautiful than any lady," she said defiantly.

Tim started and looked down at her with a friendly smile.

"Your taste is commendable, Martha," he said.

She nodded. "Ah! but you haven't seen her as I have, Mr. Curtis," she said. "She's as white as a lily. Her hair—'tis all her own, Mr. Curtis, and it comes down to here, and it shines like—like lamplight on a gentleman's sword." She caught the look on his face, and laughed saucily. "You'd fain see her as I've seen her, wouldn't you, sir? And she's that bright—'twas a pleasure to serve her."

"Then why did you leave her service?" he asked quickly.

She looked up suspiciously. "I—I was tired of service," she muttered sullenly.

"You would rather play the lady, eh? You silly little peacock!" He laughed down at her angry face.

She tossed her head indignantly. "I may be a lady some day. There's no telling. There's fortunes in faces."

"You a lady! Not you. Ladies don't tell lies about gentlemen, my dear."

"Some does. And who has told lies about gentlemen?"

"You have. You told Lady Wimbourne 'twas I who bribed you to steal her papers."

He shot the bolt without any warning, and the shot went home. A frightened look crept into her eyes and her mouth opened in astonishment.

"Does she know I did it?" she whispered. "How does she know I did it?"

Timothy was nonplussed. He had understood from Adelaide that the girl had been charged with her share in the theft and had thrown the burden on his shoulders. But now it would appear he was mistaken. He saw a chance to obtain a hold over her, but it demanded cautious treading.

"Why did you tell her I bribed you?" he repeated sternly.

"I never did!" she cried. "On my soul I never did! Why, how could I, Mr. Curtis? I left next morning. I never saw her after—" She stopped and put her hand over her mouth.

"After what?"

"I won't tell you," she said. "I won't talk to you any more about it."

"Oh, yes, you will!" said Tim cheerily. "You will tell me all about it. See here, you silly child, you would like to

go back to serve Miss Winnington? If you will tell me how you took those papers, and to whom you gave them, I will ask her to take you back."

The girl set her mouth obstinately. "I'd as lief be free," she said indifferently. "I'm tired o' service."

"You'll find prison a plaguy more wearisome place."

"Prison!" she cried. "She wouldn't send me to prison, Miss Winnington wouldn't."

"No, possibly not. But I will, if you refuse to clear me," he said sharply. "Listen here, child. Miss Winnington believes that 'twas to me you gave what you stole. She must be told the truth."

She eyed him queerly. "Why should she think that?"

"No matter why; she does think it, and you must tell the truth or go to gaol. Now, be reasonable. You took the papers?"

"He made me," she muttered defiantly.

"Very good. He made you. Who is he?"

"I won't tell you," she repeated obstinately.

Tim gave a gesture of impatience. "We'll see about that presently. Now tell me how you did it."

The girl hesitated. "You—you'll not be hard on me, Mr. Curtis?" she asked unsteadily.

"Not if you tell the truth," he answered. He looked at her. Tears were very near her eyes; he was fearful of a scene in public. "Come along into the inner room," he said kindly. "'Tis more convenient for a talk."

She rose reluctantly and followed him, evidently too frightened to refuse. Tim secured the use of one of the little rooms at the back and motioned her to sit in the chair by the window.

"Now," he said, stooping to pinch her cheek, "there's no

call for tears. I won't harm you ; but be reasonable and tell the truth. Where did you find the papers?"

"I don't know, Mr. Curtis."

"Nonsense!" said Tim, sharply. "You must know."

"I don't, Mr. Curtis, on my soul I don't. First he bid me get him my lady's writing box ; and then my lady's letter-case, and then the key of her cabinet, and then her jewel-casket. But he wouldn't tell me what he wanted and I don't know what he took."

"Her jewel-casket?" asked Tim in surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Curtis, and then he sent me back for her gold bracelet she puts under her pillow o' nights ; and I was so afraid she would waken. But he didn't take that, I had to put it back again."

"What the plague did he want it for?" muttered Tim.

"I don't know, Mr. Curtis, I don't know what he wanted. Please, sir, let me go now, there's no more to tell."

"Oh, yes, there is, my pretty one. You must tell me the name of the man whom you say made you do it."

"What will they do to him?" she asked quickly.

"That is no affair of yours. Who is he?"

"I won't tell you. I won't ever tell you, so how you ask," she said obstinately. "I'd do it again if he asked me."

Tim looked at her in desperation.

"You blessed little fool," he muttered. "I'll drag the truth out of you by some means. See here, child, be reasonable. This man's a rascal ; you must let him take his punishment. What has he done for you that you should take his crime upon your own shoulders—or for the matter of that saddle me with it? Did he give you money? I will double the price. Is it kisses he bought you with? You owe him little for that, they are cheap enough."

She flushed angrily. "He loves me. Belike he'll make me a lady."

He laughed scornfully. "Do you build on that, you silly little creature? Can't you see, child, he only uses you? When you cease to be of service to him he'll drop you into the gutter. Can't you see— Oh! plague take the woman!" He broke off savagely, staring helplessly at the girl's obstinate back.

She sat with her elbows resting on the window sill, her chin in her hand, staring out on the King's Mead. Tim put his hand on her shoulder.

"If you won't tell me, will you tell Miss Winnington?" he pleaded.

She shook her head. "I'll tell no one. I swore I would not."

"You obstinate little devil!" he cried savagely, giving her a shake. "I'll make you speak." Then he turned sharply away and strode up and down the room, mastering his temper.

Suddenly Martha started; she dropped her hands to the sill and leaning forward stared eagerly out of the window.

"Is that Miss Smallshaw?" she asked.

Tim glanced over her shoulder. "Yes," he said shortly. "What do you want with her?"

Rory Winnington and Dorothy were riding side by side across the King's Mead, their reins hanging loosely on the horses' necks, their heads close together.

Martha drew a long breath. "She's very beautiful," she muttered.

Tim gave a laugh of exasperation. "My good girl, keep to the affair in hand. See here, my dear, if you'll tell me this man's name you shall have—" He paused to think of

some object of feminine enticement. "You shall have the prettiest gown in Bath."

Martha did not answer. She was breathing quickly, leaning out over the sill with her eyes fixed on the two riders.

The King's Mead was deserted, save for these two, and it was evident they had forgotten that walls have eyes and considered themselves alone. They were a handsome couple, well matched in every way, and obviously content with each other's company. Rory rode with his hand on Dorothy's arm, his head bent low over hers, talking eagerly. Both were laughing, but there was a blush on her cheek, a glint in her eye, that bespoke an earnest undercurrent to their conversation. From their attitudes and expression it seemed that he was half pleading, half threatening, and she laughing defiance of his threat.

Suddenly, just as they passed below Mason's window, Rory gave a soft laugh of mischief, slipped his arm round Dorothy's waist and kissed her cheek. She started back with a laugh, whipped up her horse and cantered across the meadow to the west gate, while Rory rode after her with a smile in his eyes.

Timothy saw nothing of this comedy. He had flung himself desperately back into a chair, racking his brains for further arguments to move the obstinate girl. He had never in his life felt more helpless and was hard put to it to keep hold on his temper, feeling his secret so near, yet so unattainable.

Suddenly Martha threw up her head and turned to face him.

"Mr. Curtis," she said shortly, "I'll tell you what you want to know."

He stared at her in amazement. Her whole face seemed

changed, its lines were sharp and pinched; the soft lips of her pouting mouth were hard and set, the look in her eyes was almost savage.

"I'll tell you," she said, "tell you all he has done to me, and you may do to him what you will."

"Marvellous!" muttered Tim. "What the plague does this mean? Is it the dress has caught her?"

"The man who bribed me is the same——"

He stopped her with a sudden thought. "Wait," he said, "do not tell me yet. They must have no grounds for believing we've concocted the tale together. Come with me now to Miss Winnington and tell me in her presence."

"Miss Winnington?" she said slowly and for an instant her face softened. But only for an instant; it grew hard and stern once more and she nodded. "They are all o' the same feather," she muttered. "Yes, I will go with you, Mr. Curtis."

"I will send for a coach," he said, fearful of losing her again before she could reach St. James's Parade. His heart was on fire to reach Celia's side and make her hear the truth. Half an hour more and then—who knows?—he might hold her in his arms.

It was full fifteen minutes before the coach appeared. Tim paced the room impatiently, looking anxiously at Martha, lest she should show signs of relenting. But she sat passive, staring moodily before her, and he was forced to call her twice before she roused herself to follow him to the coach.

Rory Winnington, obeying Miss Smallshaw's imperative command, parted from her at the west gate, and well pleased with his morning, trotted through the streets, humming an air, till he reached his brother-in-law's house in St. James's Parade. He dismounted, threw the reins to a servant, and

learning that Tracy was in his library, strode up the stairs to join him. But as he passed the music room he heard Celia's voice singing at the harpsichord, and pushing open the door he entered on tip-toe to listen.

The words of her song were simple, composed by one of the many minor poets of the day ; but the music had a tender lilt, and she sang as though the words came from her heart :

“I made my dear a garland
To twine his brows above,
White roses for our faithfulness,
Red roses for our love.
He dropped it by the river,
And heedless let it lie,
So I have brought it home with me
To watch the roses die.

“I made my dear a promise
And sealed it with a kiss,
That all my life should be his joy,
His service all my bliss.
But Cupid never sanctioned
A bargain such as ours,
For he has ta'en my whole fond heart
And left me withered flowers.”

Her voice died away on the last word, she bowed her head down on the lid of the harpsichord and sat very still.

Rory crossed to her side and slipped his arm round her neck.

“Celia,” he said softly, “is the world going hardly with you, sister mine?”

She put up her hand to his and lifted her head. There were no tears in her eyes, only a look of infinite weariness.

"Oh, Rory," she said, "I'm glad 'tis you. Stay and talk to me; I have the vapours."

He sat down beside her on the bench of the harpsichord.

"The vapours!" he said jestingly. "What! Is the Queen of Bath already wearied of her subjects?"

"Oh, Rory," she cried impatiently, "'tis all so stale, so wearisome. Day after day, the same compliments, the same gallantries, the same jests. There is no truth, no virtue in it all. What is the worth of such a life?"

"And yet, Celie, a week ago you were entranced with your queendom?"

She leaned her cheek against his hand with a little sigh.

"Was I? But that was a week ago."

He turned her face to his. "Sister mine," he said softly, "is the Queen of Bath wearied all for lack of one of her subjects?"

She flushed and dropped her eyes. Rory ran his fingers softly over the keys of the harpsichord.

"Celie, would you have no charity—for a spy?" he asked abruptly. "No forgiveness?"

She shook her head. "How were it possible, Rory? What shred of virtue could he still possess?"

"A spy has courage; he carries his life in his hands."

"So does many an honest man."

"He might still love, child."

"And of what worth his love, tainted with dishonour? A woman, winning such love, is cheapened by his homage. Without his honour a man is stripped clean, indeed."

"Honour," said Rory slowly. "What is honour? This man holds his honour what that man holds his shame. One

will lie to save his honour; another kills for his honour's sake. Every man prates of his honour, but every honour has its price. With one 'tis gold, with another love. Who shall judge?"

She shook her head and smiled. "Rory, vagabond! I know you too well to think you earnest now. Why! 'twas you who first taught me the worth men set on honour. Do you remember? We were babies—playing we were Desmond's men. You were in hiding and I betrayed you to Laidie. You would not speak to me for a week, you held my crime so heinous. Since that day I have never, even in thought, dared to play the traitor."

Rory looked at her with a wistful smile.

"Ah! Celie, those days of dreams are very far away."

She dropped her head back upon his arm. "If honour were a dream, Rory, then I should pray God never to let me wake. But it is no dream, dear. It is the one true worth our spirits hold; let us lose that and we fall lower than Lucifer."

There was a moment's silence. Then Rory rose to his feet and crossed to the window.

"Celia," he said abruptly, "I do not believe Tim Curtis a spy."

"You do not?" she cried quickly. "What reasons have you?"

"Nay, tell me first the reasons to believe it."

"Lord Pelham himself has accused him."

"Pelham! Egad, child! Pelham's a minister. You'd sure never hold him accountable for his words?"

"But why should he accuse him falsely, unprovoked?"

"He has a quarrel with Curtis. Tim has a plucky explicit tongue on occasion."

"But—but, Rory, none else knew that Laidie had the papers."

He laughed. "Tut! child, you cannot keep a secret so close in this world. I'll lay a dozen folk knew of it. Why, I knew."

"You, Rory?"

"Yes, but for that you do not dub me spy."

"Yet if it were not Mr. Curtis, who *has* stolen the papers?"

"That I would give my left hand to find out. But if it be Tim Curtis—never again call me a judge of an honest man."

She sighed. "Ah, well! 'tis like we shall soon be assured. Tracy has promised to hunt the kingdom through till we find Martha."

Rory turned and faced her. "Martha!" he said slowly. "What should that pink-and-white piece of goods do in this affair?"

"'Tis only through her aid the papers could have been taken."

Rory nodded. "So 'twould seem, if Laidie kept them so close. So Tracy is on her track, eh?"

"Yes; she alone can give us the clue. He has promised me he will not rest till he has found her and learned the truth."

Rory eyed her a moment with a strange smile. Then his face hardened. "'Twould seem to me, sister mine," he said sharply, "that you were better employed learning the value of an honest gentleman's love, than in hounding on Tracy to track some poor devil to his doom."

Celia flushed and threw up her head. "'Tis a doom he richly deserves, Rory."

"Deserves?" he said sternly. "How know you what a man deserves? Do you think one who throws away his honour

walks so lightly without it? I tell you, child, he pays to the full the price of his freedom."

The door opened and Tracy entered hurriedly, an eager light in his eyes.

"Celia," he said, "Mr. Curtis is below. He has found this girl Martha and brought her here to clear him of suspicion."

Celia sprang to her feet with a little cry of joy.

"Ah, Tracy! I knew, I knew he was innocent. Ah! but we must ask his pardon, indeed, for this shameful insult. Bring him up, Tracy, let—let me speak to him."

Tracy eyed her doubtfully. "Wait at least, Celia, till we hear what is the girl's story."

He stepped out on to the landing to bid the servant bring up the visitors. Rory stood looking down at Celia with a wondering smile in his eyes; his face was flushed.

"You are still resolute, Celie, to hound this spy to punishment?" he asked slowly.

She clasped her hands entreatingly. "Ah! Rory, don't hold me cruel. Indeed, indeed, I pity him. But Rory darling," she coaxed, "sure I must know the truth, for until he is unmasked, Mr. Curtis bears his guilt."

He took her face between his hands and kissed it. "Go your own way then, child, and may you never repent it." He turned away as the others entered the room.

Timothy advanced to Celia with a face of triumph and a look in his eyes that called the blush to her cheeks.

"Miss Winnington, I have found the truant. And I have ventured to promise in your name that if she will tell us for whom she stole Lady Wimbourne's papers you will receive her back into your service. Have I taken too much upon myself?"

Celia looked across at the girl. "No," she said gently; "if she tells us the truth she shall suffer nothing in consequence."

"Come then," said Tim gaily, "out with it, Martha. Who is the man?"

The girl stood silent, staring at Rory, who sat at the harpsichord, with his back to the group, softly fingering the keys.

"Come, girl, speak," cried Celia impatiently, "tell us his name."

Martha threw up her head. "Yes," she said fiercely, "I'll tell you his name, Miss Winnington. He's a bad heart to treat a woman so."

She stopped suddenly. Rory had swung round on his seat and was looking at her with a face of whimsical reproach. There was neither anger nor menace in his glance, only a half weary smile under his drooping lids and the familiar mocking twist of his lips.

The others leaned toward her, waiting eagerly for her words.

"Well, speak out, girl," said Tracy impatiently.

Without warning she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. "I'll not tell you," she said, "I'll not tell you."

Timothy gave an exclamation of anger. "You little baggage!" he cried. "Out with the truth at once."

Tracy looked at him doubtfully. "Can not you tell us yourself, Curtis?"

"No," said Tim, angrily. "Like a fool I would not let her tell before. I would not have you think there was any collusion." He put his hand on the girl's shoulder and gave

her a little shake. "Now then. You promised you would tell Miss Winnington. You shall speak."

She flung him off with a savage movement and turned on him furiously. "Then I will speak. Sir Tracy, 'twas him, 'twas Mr. Curtis who made me steal. 'Twas him as took the papers."

Rory swung round to the harpsichord, and ran a scale up the keys. His face was crimson with suppressed laughter.

Tim stood a minute absolutely silent, mastering his rage.

"You lying little jade," he said unsteadily. "How dare you?" He looked round on the others eagerly. "Why, it's clear she is lying. Should I have brought her here to tell such a tale?"

"No," said Tracy drily. "Doubtless it was a very different story she was instructed to relate."

Tim faced him squarely. "You believe her tale?" he asked.

Tracy bowed. "It has the air of truth, Mr. Curtis."

Tim turned away with a hard laugh of exasperation. "Then it seems I must seek a less convincing liar," he said shortly. He glanced at Celia and his lip quivered. He crossed to her side and looked her straight in the eyes. "Remember, Mistress Celia," he said softly, "I have still my week."

Then he went quietly away.

There was silence for a moment after his departure. Then Tracy beckoned Martha to follow him and left Rory alone with his sister.

Celia stood silent by the window with averted face, staring out into the sunshine with hard, tearless eyes. Rory rose and put his hand on hers.

"An I were in your place, sister mine," he said softly, "I

would not take the word of a jealous woman against that of an honourable man. Let your heart speak, child; I warrant its eyes see deeper than the world's judgment."

He kissed her lightly and left her alone.

Celia stood long where he had left her, with a hard look on her face and a dull ache in her heart.

"What is the matter with me?" she cried helplessly. "The sun shines brightly, the birds still sing, the flowers bloom sweetly; all the world is fair as ever, and I, only I, am flat and stale and wearisome. Ah! what ails me?"

She stared out over the smiling landscape with quivering lip; then she dropped her eyes and started. On the window sill, in the full blaze of the sunshine, close to the petals of a climbing rose, was a large butterfly, his bright colours shimmering in the light; he was crawling painfully toward the green of the rose-tree, dragging a broken wing.

With a little cry she sank on her knees, the tears streaming from her eyes.

"Poor butterfly," she whispered, "poor butterfly! You understand. The sun shines, the birds sing, the flowers bloom sweetly; but you and I have broken our wings, we shall never fly again."

CHAPTER XVII

“PAN’S FORTUNE”

THE nave of the Abbey Church on a fine Sunday in July, with the sunshine slanting in from the high windows, upon silks and satins of every conceivable hue, upon waving plumes, flashing jewels, glittering sword-hilts and buckles, and gleaming necks and arms, bore a strange resemblance to a field of Dutch tulips after a passing shower of rain, when each dew-filled cup flashes its shimmering colours back at the sunbeams and, swayed hither and thither by the breeze, pours out its heart in a wealth of perfume.

The congregation was never still; there was ever a rustling, a whispering, a clanking of swords; the air was heavy with innumerable perfumes and stirred by the waving of multi-coloured fans. The grey walls made a fitting background to this blaze of colour. It was a gay assemblage, and if some there deemed that they did God sufficient service by occupying His house for an hour a week, perchance He, who made them what they were, found pardon.

The congregation rose and rustled out into the sunshine, spreading out like a wide fan across the Abbey Green, and hastening toward the Orange Grove and the walks beyond.

“You are amazing impertinent, Mr. Winnington,” laughed Dorothy. “How dare you sit by me in the Abbey after your behaviour yesterday?”

“Egad, madam! what did I do amiss?” asked Rory reproachfully. “Did you not bid me give you proof of my courage? What greater proof were possible than to brave your anger and steal what you withheld?”

"Thieves should be imprisoned, Mr. Winnington."

"Am I not already fettered by your eyes?"

Dorothy looked at him almost wistfully. "Are you ever serious, I wonder?" she sighed.

"Heaven forfend, madam! Never, save for the morning hour after a merry night. I have not yet found any affair worthy of serious thought—except a headache."

"Not even the wooing of a wife, Mr. Winnington?" asked Lady Westerby.

"That least of all, madam. If she would not take me laughing, I would not take her at all."

"Yet how should she know your meaning if you laugh at your own vows?"

"Faith! I'd marry her first and explain my meaning afterwards."

"Indeed, yours will be a strange wooing, sir."

"A plague on your wooing! I would say," he turned to Dorothy, "I would say: 'Look you, ma'am, I've a mind to be married to you on Wednesday next at Gretna. Let it be boot, saddle, to horse and away on Monday night at ten o' the clock.'"

Lady Westerby laughed. "And should she refuse the offer?"

"Why then, madam, I turn elsewhere. I hold with the poet: 'If she be not fair to me, what care I how fair she be?'"

"And you would expect a woman to entrust herself to your care?" asked Dorothy slowly. "Surely you must deem the sex crazy."

He turned and looked at her with a smile. "Egad! madam, were she afraid I would have none of her."

"Methinks you are like to live and die a bachelor, Mr. Winnington," laughed Lady Westerby, turning away.

"Indeed, madam, there are worse fates," laughed Rory.

"You're monstrous ungallant," pouted Dorothy.

Rory stooped and looked into her eyes with a reckless smile: "Well, madam,—Gretna awaits you."

Dorothy laughed nervously. "Faith, sir, I prefer a less tempestuous wooing."

"What! with Lady Westerby's headshakings over your lover's improvidence and Lord Westerby's frowns at his debts? With lawyers here and guardians there, and ceremony everywhere? Piff! away with it all—I'll have none of it. But, Dorothy—" he stooped again nearer, "the wide, white road and the thunder of the hoofs and the rush of the cold night air. Ten minutes alone with the worthy blacksmith,—and then—and then—Dorothy——"

"Lud! then belike a headache, Mr. Winnington," she laughed.

He joined in her laugh. "There are some matters, madam, worth a headache, had a woman but the courage to believe it."

"I do not lack courage," said Dorothy angrily.

"Then shall it be Gretna, madam?"

She laughed. "Methinks you said ten o' the clock on Monday. There is time 'twixt then and now for you to woo a dozen women, Mr. Winnington. Are we all to travel north in company?"

"Faith! it would be a merry journey," laughed Rory. "Yet there is but one woman who boasts the courage to come with me and I do not go to seek her despairing."

"You have amazing confidence," said Dorothy, frowning.

"We leave it at Monday then, madam?" He laughed and strode away to greet Lucy de Putren.

Lucy de Putren was leaning against the wall of the terrace watching Timothy Curtis, who was talking apart with Lady Westerby. Timothy had taken his second banishment from Celia's side very quietly. Perhaps his eyes were a shade harder, his laugh a shade less ready, but he gave no other sign of how bitter had been the disappointment of his hopes. He had lost all clue to the personality of the spy he sought to unmask, and was for the time at a loss which way to turn in his search. It seemed hopeless to make another attempt to extract her secret from Martha. Yet he had but two days more of the week he had begged of Celia, and as he watched her walk home from the abbey with Charles Rathborne by her side, there was a look in his eyes as of one who sees the closing of the gates of paradise.

Lucy de Putren marked his face and gave an impatient sigh.

"Mr. Winnington," she said shortly, "an I were a man and loved a woman I'd not waste my breath in sighing. What ails Mr. Curtis, think you, that he hath lost all his courage?"

"It seems the Fates have a quarrel against him, and he's out o' court at Olympus. He has the devil's own luck just now."

"Heaven pity him," sighed Lucy.

"I think one angel's pity would be enough for him without troubling the whole hierarchy," laughed Rory. "Women ask so much of a man."

"Women! You mean Celia? Mr. Winnington, I crave your pardon for saying it, but Celia is a fool."

"Say rather a dreamer who will not stoop to pick up what

the gods have thrown her because, forsooth, it hath lain a moment in the dust."

"Lud! a fool or a dreamer—'tis all one to me," said Lucy sharply. "I've small patience with either. One moment she's for flouting her friendship with him in the face of Bath, and the next she is looking through him as though he were nothing better than a scarecrow. If I were Tim Curtis I would tell her plainly what I thought of such conduct."

"Give him your advice, madam," laughed Rory. "He is plaguily in need of some."

"I will," said Lucy resolutely, stepping forward to intercept Tim as he left Lady Westerby's side.

"Mr. Curtis," she said, "no man is meet to wed a woman who has not courage to woo her."

Tim looked astonished at this sudden attack. He liked Lucy de Putren and she knew herself privileged to speak her mind. She turned and walked beside him.

"Mr. Curtis, when a woman sees a man grow grave for love of a girl and the girl breaking her heart for lack of him, surely, in the interests of a merry world, she should bid him be wise in time."

Timothy turned and looked at her eagerly. "Breaking her heart, madam?" he asked quickly.

"Ay, breaking her heart or souring her temper—'tis one and the same thing, the one is but the outward sign of the other. I' Heaven's name, Mr. Curtis, what is the quarrel between you and Celia?"

"She has been told on the most excellent authority that I am a Government spy, madam, and believing that, what should she do but scorn me?"

"Believing it—yes. But why the murrain should she believe it?"

"I cannot disprove it—yet."

"Then teach her to trust you without proof. And mark me, Mr. Curtis, you will never do that by holding aloof and leaving her to those who believe you guilty."

"But, Lady de Putren, I have promised that I will not annoy her with my presence."

"You have promised? Without doubt. Tell me, Mr. Curtis, did she ask you for such a promise?"

"Why no, madam," said Tim, with a laugh of dawning comprehension.

"I knew it!" cried Lucy triumphantly. "Oh, you men will never learn wisdom. Go to her, Mr. Curtis, and teach her you've a tongue as well as your accusers."

"Go to her! Egad! monstrous sage advice, but not so easily obeyed. I am no welcome visitor at St. James's Parade."

Lucy gazed at the distant horizon, a mischievous smile playing about her lips. "This afternoon Celia drives with me to Beechen Wood. Are you like to walk in that direction?"

"Madam, never in my life was I more set on such a walk," answered Tim, with twinkling eyes.

"Then we may chance to meet. And—look you—Mr. Curtis, no cowardice. Play the rude Boreas and scatter the clouds that would hide the light of your Moon."

As Celia drove out into the country with Lady de Putren that afternoon, down the rose-bordered lanes to Beechen Wood, for the first time her friend's high spirits and saucy tongue jarred on her nerves. Lucy chattered unceasingly, holding forth upon the follies of mortals in general and women in particular; breaking ever and anon into a little laugh of reminiscence or anticipation entirely inexplicable to Celia.

"It would seem I grow dense, Lucy," she broke out at last, impatiently, "but what is there to call for laughter in your story of that madcap, Delia Leslie?"

"Child, there is cause for laughter in all mad doings. Therefore let you and I be mad to-day, for it seems you have forgotten how to laugh this week past."

Celia started. "Am I, indeed, so stale, Lucy? Nay then I'll join any frolic you choose, so it be not selling oranges in Old Drury like her Grace."

"Come with me to drink at Pan's well, and sigh our wishes, then," said Lucy, promptly stopping the coach. "'Tis but over that stile and a few paces through the wood there. We'll play Chloe and Phyllis. Maybe a country Colin will come our way and we will win his heart for sport. Come, Celia."

"You are mad, Lucy," said Celia reluctantly, alighting from the coach. "But if you will have it so be quick. Where is this well you speak of?"

Lucy led the way down one of the narrow green glades of the wood till they reached a small, moss-carpeted clearing in the centre of which was the well. It was sunk in the ground, roughly built round with lichened stone work, and bowered in climbing roses. Three old stone steps, hollowed with age, led down to the water. Celia gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"How lovely, Lucy! I vow 'tis a most romantic spot for your Colin. How comes it I have never been here before?"

"Oh! 'twas a vastly 'modish place last summer, but this year 'tis out o' date. There have been no pilgrimages in search of Pan's fortune."

"Pan's fortune?"

"Yes. Did I not tell you 'twas a wishing well? Whoso drinks and cries on Pan shall have his wish."

She tripped down the steps, cupped her hand, and stooping lifted the water to her lips. "Hear, O Pan! for I come a most unselfish petitioner. Grant that a maid may know her mind and that the Moon may cease her multitudinous changes." She lifted a mischievous face to Celia as she remounted the steps. "Now, Celia, 'tis your turn. Drink and wish. Pan will hear, though you wish in silence."

Laughing, half against her will, Celia stepped down to the water and drank. Then she leaned further over the well and resting her hand on the stone wall gazed long down at her own reflection in its depths.

"How clear it is. One would almost hope to see the goat-footed god sitting in the deep, but 'tis only one's own face. There's an allegory in that thought, Lucy, had one but the wit to work it out. I shall offer the fancy to Mr. Walpole when we go back to town."

There was no answer save the soft rustling of the leaves. Celia looked round; Lucy had disappeared.

Celia turned back to the water and waited for her friend to return, supposing she had wandered further down the glade. The minutes passed; she did not reappear.

Presently Celia rose and walked after her, calling her name, puzzling over her disappearance.

"Faith! 'twould seem the madcap hath met her Colin," she muttered impatiently. She could find no sign of Lucy and retracing her steps hurried back to the road where they had left the coach. The road was empty; coach, grooms and Lady de Putren herself had all disappeared!

Celia gazed blankly around. She was alone in the wide smiling landscape, not a living creature was in sight. It

was evident that Lucy had deserted her, for what mad purpose she could not conceive. She was very angry, but she had no mind to tramp back to Bath alone; she would wait until it pleased some one to find her. She sat down stiffly by the roadside, but the sun beat down fiercely and the dust was unpleasant. Presently she rose and went back into the wood, and sitting on the stone wall of the well, resumed her meditations upon her allegory, varied by indignant musings upon the meaning of Lucy's frolic.

The wood was very quiet; ever and anon the soft whistle of a bird broke the stillness, and always the rustling leaves whispered the secrets of nature. But it was evident that she was quite alone. The silence almost frightened her; it seemed so fraught with mystery.

Presently, far down in the depths of the wood, a twig snapped sharply, and a rich, baritone voice broke suddenly into song:

“Oh! Pan has a kingdom and blithe is his sway,
They know no regret who his ruling obey,
For hope is his counsel and joy his command,
And youth the reward we receive at his hand.
Though faces be furrowed hearts cannot grow old,
'Neath the sway of his sceptre no future looks cold;
But fear he must scorn and all prudence must ban
Who'd taste Fortune's cup in the kingdom of Pan.”

The words died away, but the music still lilted merrily in a low whistle; the bushes behind the well were parted and Tim Curtis stepped out into the mossy circle.

He started to find Celia alone, and his eyes gleamed gladly. “Good-evening, Miss Winnington,” he said gaily. “What brings you here at this hour, and alone?”

Celia rose to her feet and faced him, crimson with indignation. She understood now the meaning of Lucy's desertion and raged to think that any man should have dared to lay such a plot to take her unawares and force his company upon her.

"Methinks, Mr. Curtis," she said coldly, "there is but small need to pretend such amazement. 'Tis evident you looked to find me here."

He faced her with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"'Tis true, madam, Lady de Putren told me at noon that she and you would drive this way to-day. But 'twas she I looked to find here."

"Then you must look elsewhere, sir," said Celia shortly. "Lady de Putren has gone."

"Gone? And left you alone? How so?"

"It's very like you know the explanation better than I do," she answered angrily. "When my back was turned she drove away and left me alone."

Timothy laughed softly. He crossed the clearing and sat on the stone wall of the well.

"'Pon my honour, madam, I had not expected this most base desertion. I am in like case. Rory vowed to meet me here with his curriole at four of the clock, and here's no sign of him. So here are we two marooned five miles from Bath, with no help in sight. What is to become of us, madam?"

Celia eyed him indignantly. "For my part, I do not anticipate that Lady de Putren will long delay her return, yet if she does I—I shall drive home with Rory."

"And leave me to bear my fate alone? Madam, you are no true comrade in misfortune."

She did not answer, but stood stiffly awaiting his departure. Timothy smiled at her whimsically.

"Might I propose, madam, as we may yet have some time to wait our rescue, that you should sit?"

Celia seated herself angrily on the further side of the wall.

"I was about to propose, Mr. Curtis," she said haughtily, "that you might conceivably find a seat elsewhere, where your presence would be less irksome to me. The wood is wide."

"Faith! madam, I regret if the sight of me disfigures the landscape for you," he answered, smiling. "Yet 'tis a fault easily remedied." He crossed to her side and leaned on the wall behind her. "Now, madam, if you will turn your head but a little—so—you will not notice my presence."

Celia gave a little gasp of amazement at his coolness. For a moment her lips twitched; but she repressed her desire to laugh. She was still very angry.

"You are amazing impudent," she said shortly. "Why do you not respect my wishes and leave me?"

"Ah, madam, in Bath you are queen, and we obey your behests. But here we have strayed into the kingdom of Pan, and bow to his rule alone."

"Then am I to be put to the inconvenience of awaiting Lady de Putren in the roadway?" she asked coldly. Yet she made no motion to rise and leave him.

"The Fates have thrown us together, madam," he continued gaily, "at the foot of Pan's throne. What shall we ask of the god?"

"I have already asked you to leave me, Mr. Curtis," she said haughtily.

“Faith! madam, it’s not of me you must make request here. I am a subject of Pan and can but do his bidding.”

“That is to be regretted since his bidding seemingly forces you to such unmannerly conduct.”

“Ah, madam! don’t flout the god in the heart of his kingdom, or who knows what evil may come of it? You and I, madam, must speak him fair, and then, who knows? We may taste of ‘Pan’s fortune.’ Do you know what is the secret magic of this well?”

She did not answer. Her white hands lay still upon her knee; her whole attitude expressed rigid disapproval. Timothy eyed her back with a whimsical shake of his head.

“At a certain hour, madam,” he continued slowly, “none know surely which, but ’tis held to be when the sun steals through the shade and crimsons the water with his kisses, a magic falls upon this spot. He who then draws near to taste of the water forgets the past, thinks not upon the future, but lives for one short hour in the glory of the present, heeding naught besides. That, madam, is ‘Pan’s fortune.’ ’Tis given to few mortals to dare to taste its sweetness.”

She turned her head a little and stared down at the water, flushing in the low rays of the sun.

“See, madam,” he whispered, “it crimsons. The hour has come.”

He passed behind her, and stepping down to the well stooped and drank. Then he took out his gold snuff-box, threw out its contents, washed it out and filled it with clear water. He turned and held it out to her. “Drink, madam,” he pleaded. “Taste of ‘Pan’s fortune!’ ”

She took it and laid it on the wall beside her. “Mr. Cur-

tis," she asked slowly, "did you plot with Lady de Putren to trap me here alone?"

He looked at her with a little smile of reproach. "That is the past," he said whimsically; "I have drunk and forgotten."

She turned away with a helpless gesture of impatience. Tim picked up the snuff-box and handed it to her again.

"Do you fear to drink, madam?" he asked, smiling into her eyes. "Do you fear to forget the past—and the thought of the future?"

She rose and turned away. "Mr. Curtis," she said unsteadily, "you forget your situation and mine. You forget the conventions. Were you more chivalrous you would take pity on the—the embarrassment of my position and leave me alone. A woman—cannot—dare not—forget her world."

"Dare not?" He put his hand gently on her shoulder and drew her back to her seat.

"You and I, Mistress Celia," he said softly, "are two children who have lost our way in a wood. The world is that wood, and we have gone astray in it, and stand weeping because our path has grown so dark, and the light of love has left us, and we cannot see our way. And all the time, Mistress Celia, our nurse — dear Mother Nature — is calling to us to come back to her again. But we are afraid."

She lifted her hands and clasped them beneath her chin. Her eyes widened with thought.

"Yes," she said slowly. "We are afraid."

"Because we have wandered far into the wood, and the briars of convention bar our passage, and the thorns of slander tear our clothes, and Mother Nature's voice, bid-

ding us take courage, is very faint and far away. But let us put trust in one another. Let us take hands and run back from the terror of this wood, following the guidance of our own hearts, and step out again into the sunshine to Mother Nature's arms."

He took her hand gently; she let it lie in his. "Are you still afraid, Mistress Celia?" he asked softly.

"Ah!" she whispered, "they told me you had the tongue of angels."

His face flushed with sudden anger, but he checked the outburst. "Madam, be careful, you are letting the thorns of slander blind your sight," he said whimsically. "It is not my words but your heart I would have you obey. We cannot win from the wood alone, Mistress Celia; we must trust one another. Are you afraid?"

She sat silent; he watched her face with a passionate eagerness. Suddenly she threw up her head proudly and turned to him a face alight with love.

"No," she said proudly, "I am not afraid. If I love you surely love may pardon even dishonour."

He took both her hands in his and looked her squarely in the face. "No, madam, not so. Dishonour would kill love. If you love me you must trust me. I will have naught else."

"You—you won't have my love?" she faltered.

"I will have your trust first."

Tears darkened her eyes. She turned away. "I cannot, I cannot—yet," she cried. "I would so fain say I do trust you; but it would not be the truth. I only know that for good or evil I love you."

A shadow of disappointment crossed his face. He dropped her hands.

"So we must still wander on into the wood, madam," he said drily, "seeking more courage."

She bowed her head with a helpless sob. He wavered. Then his eyes fell on the snuff-box. A queer smile crossed his face.

"You cannot forgive the past, you cannot trust the future," he said slowly. "Mistress Celia, have you courage to forget both—for an hour? Dare you taste 'Pan's fortune' and lose recollection of all save the sweetness of the present? Can you trust me so far?"

For a long minute she looked into his eyes. Then with a little doubting laugh she raised the cup to her lips and drank. Turning to him she held out her hands in gesture of surrender. "For an hour," she said softly.

He put his arm round her and kissed her. Then, with his arm still about her, they sat down on the wall together and she dropped her head back on his shoulder with a sigh of absolute content.

So they sat while the sun crimsoned the horizon and the shadows of the trees grew longer and longer across the mossy sward. They did not talk much; the song of the birds and the whisper of the leaves spoke all they had to say. Only they tasted to the full the sweetness of Pan's magic and were at peace.

At last Timothy lifted up his head; he heard the sound of wheels far down the road. He kissed her once more and rose to his feet.

"The hour has passed, Celia," he said, "and memories return."

She looked up, and she, too, heard the wheels. She met his eyes and suddenly flushed crimson. "Ah," she cried, "what have we been doing?"

He smiled at her reassuringly. "Daring to dream. This has been our hour, dear, and come what may now, I, for one, have sighted heaven."

But the look of distress deepened in her eyes.

"Ah!" she cried, "surely I have been mad, mad! I forgot all — all save —! What have I done? How could I?"

"Magic, Mistress Celia," he laughed softly. "'Pan's fortune.'"

She turned away with her white hands clasped tightly.

"What must you think of me?" she muttered. "Sure you must indeed despise me now."

"No, no, dear," he said quickly. "Don't spoil the memory of our hour. I think of you now, as always, as the bravest and sweetest among women; one who dares to dream and yet whose dreams are pure."

"And to-morrow?" she asked.

"In truth the hour has passed," he said, smiling wistfully, "if the shadow of to-morrow falls already on our path. Never fear, dear, you shall have no after regrets. Either I will prove myself worthy the love you have given me or I will see you no more."

When Lucy de Putren, with a guilty face, hurried back to the wood for Celia, she found her alone, sitting as she had left her, her hands in her lap, gazing down at the dark water. For a moment she was disappointed, and muttered an exclamation against the folly of man. Then her eyes rested upon a gold snuff-box in the girl's hand, and she broke into a mischievous smile.

"Come, Celia, surely you've forgiven my frolic," she said coaxingly. "Did you catch a Colin, eh?"

Celia made no answer. She rose, and slipped her hand

through her friend's arm and looked round with a wistful smile.

"Let us go home, Lucy. The light is dying, and the wood—the wood is very lonely now."

As she drove homeward with her silent companion Lucy grimaced dismally out into the darkness.

"A body might expect a word of confidence—or gratitude," she mused. "But, oh dear, no! not one. 'Tis monstrous dull playing the Fates to a woman."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CLUE

MORE resolute now than ever to unmask the man whose guilt he bore, Timothy, as he trudged home to Bath, racked his brains for a clue to the mystery of the stolen papers. But no light came to guide his search. He half repented his chivalrous promise to Celia to redeem his parole should he be unable to prove his honesty; for the week he had demanded expired on the Tuesday evening; only two days remained to him in which to discover the spy. The difficulty of the task appalled him, but he did not lose hope. Three people knew the secret, from one of those three he could surely extract the truth.

His first thought was to post to London, beard Lord Pelham and learn from him the name of the man who served him. But he speedily dismissed this plan; his last interview with that minister, in which he rejected the proffered bribe, had been marked by so acrimonious a tone that he was by no means inclined to risk a second. He shrewdly suspected that only his relationship to Lord Westerby saved him from a more open vengeance than that which Pelham had already taken. Nevertheless, he abandoned this scheme with regret; he felt he could have expressed himself very forcibly on the subject of his lordship's conduct. It was not to be expected that Pelham should intrust the true name of his spy to Sir Thomas Winnington (that minister as generally untrusted as he was universally beloved), but it was an action worthy of his peculiar genius to throw the

onus of the dishonour on the man who had scorned him for proposing that dishonour.

From Lord Pelham Timothy turned to the maid, Martha, debating the advisability of a second appeal to her. But he knew no fresh entreaty or threat to move her; further argument with her seemed waste of time.

There remained only Josiah Smith. Timothy had already once run up against the stone wall of his honour, his only hope now was to surprise the secret out of him.

With this end in view, he set out early on Monday morning in search of Josiah. He did not know where the man lodged, but knew enough to feel sure that he could exact what information he chose from Mr. Cogswell, that redoubtable trimmer. Accordingly, he bent his steps toward Gay Street in pursuit of the mayor.

It was yet early and the streets were quiet. Here and there a rosy-cheeked maid was scrubbing steps and polishing knockers, while a man whistled her a serenade from a neighbouring area. The morning was hot and most of the windows were open, but a fresh breeze fluttered the curtains and curled the dust in little spirals of cloud along the street. As Timothy turned into Quiet Street, a sharp puff of wind almost carried away his hat. At the same moment, the breeze caught the curtain of an upper window of a house a few yards in front of him; the curtain bellowed inward and then flew out through the casement, sweeping in its folds a sheet of paper which eddied a circle or two in the air and then descended to the ground at Timothy's feet.

Timothy stooped mechanically to pick it up. He looked up at the casement but no head appeared; evidently its loss had not been marked. He turned it over to see whether it were of sufficient importance to justify his ringing at the

bell and returning it to the owner. It proved to be a half-finished letter in a bold feminine handwriting.

"Dear Myra," it ran, "I am half crazy with fears. If Heaven send not help by Monday night I can endure no more. A black-hearted scoundrel writes me——"

Here the letter broke off abruptly ; it would seem the writer had been interrupted or had no heart to finish her correspondence. There was no explanation, no signature—only this desperate cry of helplessness from a woman's breaking heart.

Timothy stared at the letter and then looked up again at the house. All was quiet, undisturbed. No face appeared at the casement, no voice broke the stillness. The street, too, was deserted, Timothy stood alone in the sunshine with the letter in his hand.

He was puzzled what course to pursue. He could not endure the thought of handing in that letter at the door to be inspected by prying eyes of maid and footman ; he would not leave it where it had fallen to carry its story to every curious passer-by.

He threw one more glance up at the house. It looked so calm, so quiet, so respectable with its air of comfortable prosperity, and yet somewhere behind those grey walls a woman was breaking her heart in fear lest help should not come. What manner of help, he wondered, did the writer seek? Was it a woman's pity or a man's sword? Who was she to be so void of friends that even hope had deserted her?

As he passed the grey house in Quiet Street, suddenly he heard a lute thrummed somewhere in the upper story ; the contrast between this merry sound and the heart-broken words of the letter struck him afresh with pity. Was the writer tortured by that merry tune? Or was she, in des-

perate struggle to hide her misery, the player beating out the music with trembling hands and aching heart?

He had affairs enough of his own on hand, yet two days remained to him in which to fulfil them; this woman had but a dozen hours. "If Heaven send not help—" What help? The letter spoke of a black-hearted scoundrel; he longed to cross that scoundrel's blade.

It might be that the woman was young and lonely, with no man in all that wide city of Bath in whom she could place her trust. It might be she went in fear of a bully for lack of a sword to silence his threats.

"If Heaven send not help—" And the letter had fallen at his feet!

Without pausing to map out his course of conduct, acting only on the impulse of the moment, Timothy paused before the grey house and rang the bell. The maid who opened the door betrayed no surprise at seeing him, but in response to his request to see her mistress ushered him at once upstairs into the very room from the window of which the letter had fallen.

Once in the house a sudden embarrassment fell upon him, he had not a notion how to proceed with his undertaking. He was conscious of a certain impertinence in his presence there at all.

"If she deny her confidence," he muttered, "it will be, bedad, awkward. I can but crave pardon and retire."

The music of the lute stopped suddenly and there was a short silence. Then a skirt rustled along the corridor, the door opened, and Delia Leslie entered the room.

It was impossible for any one living in Bath not to have heard of this woman's doings; and Timothy was no exception.

As she advanced to meet him with smiling lips and the coquettish glance the woman in her could not restrain, he noticed that dark rings were round her eyes, and her smile was hard and forced. Assuredly, she was in trouble.

He drew out the letter and handed it to her. "I have come to restore your property, madam."

She snatched the paper eagerly and glanced at it, then a look of bitter disappointment crossed her face. She gave a quick sigh, crumpled it in her hand and tossed it into the grate.

"Is that all—?" she muttered. "I had hoped—" She stopped and eyed him curiously. "Where did you find it, sir?"

"It fell from the window at my feet, Mrs. Leslie. I thought it best to return it to you in person."

She nodded. "Thank you," she said absently; "I am vastly obliged."

She stood waiting for him to take his leave. Something in the despondency of her attitude gave him fresh courage.

"Madam, I read your letter," he said simply, "and I have a sword. If you require help, I beg you hold me at your service; if not, I take my leave."

She lifted her head slowly and faced him.

"You would help me?" she asked slowly.

"I am here to put myself at your commands."

"But why? Why?" she murmured amazedly.

"The letter fell at my feet," he said simply; "I learned you had need of help."

She drew a deep breath and looked at him curiously. "We—we have never been much acquainted, Mr. Curtis."

"What has that to do with the matter, madam? I hold

that a gentleman's sword should always be at the service of a woman in distress."

"And you have come here to offer your help without reservation—without condition?" she asked slowly.

"If you will honour me by accepting it."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears. "I don't understand," she said softly, "but Heaven knows I need the help you offer. I have sought Bath for such a man as you, and failed to find him. There were always—conditions."

"Surely not, madam," he said gravely. "Sir Victor Poinson?"

Her face softened. "Ah! he indeed were different. But I could not tell him my trouble." She paused, and then continued quickly. "'Tis a case of blackmail, Mr. Curtis. Ah! I've been crazy. 'Madcap Delia Leslie,' they call me, and I live up to my reputation. But this affair was so long ago, when Mr. Leslie lived. I—I was wed at sixteen, Mr. Curtis; do not blame me. I could not love my husband. He—my lover—he was an adventurer and abused my youth. Then he held my letters over me and lived on my bounty till death took him. I could not trace the letters, but heard no more of them and hoped the affair was dead. And then—the very day after I am affianced to Sir Victor—these letters come again to haunt me."

"Who holds them, madam?"

"I do not know. The man writes from the 'Cock and Bull' tavern. He threatens that if I fail to meet him to-night at nine o' the clock with 300 guineas, he will expose me. But I have not a half the sum. I have lost so heavily at whist of late, and I knew not how to raise it alone. I was writing as you see to Lady Martin, but she is ill, and fur-

ther, how could a woman assist? But if you will help me, perhaps you could go to the Jews—and——”

“Nonsense, madam,” laughed Tim; “that’s no way to meet blackmail. If you pay once he will sponge you dry. A horsewhip is what this scoundrel deserves.”

“Ah! no, I dare not risk refusal. I could not endure that Victor should see my letters as he threatens.”

“Never fear. He won’t carry out that threat. ’Twould spoil his market.”

She shook her head. “You don’t understand, Mr. Curtis! ’Tis not to Victor he would take the letters. If I pay not he will find a ready market elsewhere. I—I have enemies, sir, and many would gladly pay the sum to ruin me with Victor.”

Tim nodded thoughtfully. “I see. The rascal must be silenced. But not with gold. Leave me to deal with him. I’ll keep your appointment——”

“You cannot. He writes that I must go myself and alone to the tavern with the full amount of money and show his letter as token. If I fail to fulfil these conditions my letters will be offered elsewhere. Ah! what can I do?”

Timothy stood a moment, silent. Then his eyes twinkled.

“Look you, Mrs. Leslie, we are of an even height. Have you a long cloak and hood to spare me? I’ll play the woman and beard the fellow in your stead. Never fear, but I will silence him by force or guile.”

She gave a cry of excitement. “You would do that? Will it be possible, Mr. Curtis?”

“Why not? ’Twill be dark, and there should be no need to speak till I am closeted with the scoundrel. Give me his letter, madam.”

She drew it from her pocket and handed it to him. He

glanced at it and muttered an oath of astonishment; the handwriting was identical with that of the note which had warned him of the plan to kidnap him.

He stared down at it in puzzled bewilderment. Who was the writer? Adelaide, Dorothy, Celia?—all his former conjectures were proved unfounded, they were not the women to stoop to blackmail; yet, if not one of these, who else had learned the conspirators' plans and what was their object in warning him? His heart beat eagerly. Surely if he learned the key to this mystery he might find some clue to the traitor he sought to unmask. It was a hope, slight, elusive, but yet one clear chance to cling to in the vague tangle of his suspicions.

Delia Leslie watched his face wonderingly. What is it, Mr. Curtis?" she asked curiously.

He laughed. "Madam, you bring me luck. It seems that in tracking your hare I cross a quarry of my own; I also have affairs with the writer of this letter."

"You know him?"

"Not yet, madam. I trust we shall become better acquainted at nine o'clock to-night. And now the cloak."

"You cannot carry it through the streets now; I will send it to your lodging later."

"So be it. I'll delay you no longer now. Rest assured, madam, your anxiety is over, and you shall have your letters to-night."

She laid her hand on his arm. "Mr. Curtis," she said softly, "it is difficult for a woman to thank a man."

Timothy blushed with embarrassment. "There's no need, madam; the bearding of a scoundrel is matter of vast enjoyment. So in this I serve myself."

“And—you will not think too hardly of me in the future,” she pleaded.

“Good Heavens! madam,” he cried desperately, “who made me a judge over women?”

She sighed. “Ah! Mr. Curtis, a guilty conscience is apt to see judgment in every eye. I fear——”

“Then you do wrong,” he interrupted; “let the past go, madam. Henceforth you will be accountable only to Victor Poinson.”

Her face grew softer. “Believe me, Mr. Curtis, I’ll prove a loyal wife to him.”

“There’s not a doubt of it, madam,” he answered gaily, and took his departure, eager to end an interview that grew embarrassing.

The hours dragged on for him until evening came. He passed the time in an unavailing search for Josiah Smith, but all his hopes now were bent on the interview before him, it seemed so likely that the man who knew the conspirators’ plans and had cared to warn him was none other than the man he sought.

When nine o’clock came he donned his woman’s cloak and hood and slipped quietly down Peter’s Wynd to the “Cock and Bull” tavern. He carried sword and pistol beneath his cloak, for he judged the tavern no safe place for him should his identity be discovered. His nerve had recovered from the fears his capture had awakened, and the spirit of adventure was strong upon him when he pushed open the door of the tavern and entered with the mincing step and furtive air he judged suited to the part he played. His hood fell far over his face and he held his handkerchief to his lips further to conceal his features.

The front bar of the tavern was empty save for an elderly

woman who sat knitting busily by the dim light of a rush candle. She looked at him curiously, and for a moment Timothy thought she penetrated his disguise, but if she did she made no sign. She glanced at the letter held out to her as a token of his errand, and with a nod motioned him to follow her up the stairs.

His eyes gleaming with eagerness, his feet stumbling perpetually over the long skirts of his cloak, Timothy obeyed her gesture. She lighted him up to the narrow cupboard staircase and down a short passage to a small room at the back of the tavern, where a dim oil lamp burned on the table. The room was poorly furnished; the low half-shuttered window looked into a narrow yard.

"Wait here," said the woman curtly. She shut the door behind her and walked away.

Timothy waited for five minutes. His heart beat uncomfortably quickly. He felt under his cloak for his pistol and loosened his sword in its sheath. If the old woman had by any chance recognised him, he was trapped indeed, and was likely to have need of all his wits and his sword-play to effect escape.

At last he heard a step approaching the door and the tap of a woman's heels. He pulled the hood closer round his face and stood with his back to the light, awaiting her entrance. The door opened and Martha Williams appeared on the threshold.

Timothy made no motion of surprise; he stood with bowed head waiting for her to open the attack.

Martha eyed him superciliously and laughed. Then she shut the door and, flinging herself into a chair, said, with a ludicrous attempt at haughty insolence.

"So, mistress, you've come. It's to be hoped you have

the gold with you, or you are like to have your journey in vain. If you haggle over the price, there are others who will pay it, I'll warrant."

Timothy, curbing his stride, crossed to her side and flung himself at her feet in an attitude of supplication. His eyes twinkled beneath the dark shadow of his hood. He laid his right hand as it were pleadingly on both hers, and suddenly flung up his left arm and pressed his fingers tightly across her lips.

"So, my pretty," he said, shaking back his hood, "it's blackmail this time, is it?"

The girl stared at him, her eyes wide with fear and astonishment. For a minute Timothy held her rigid, then he cautiously moved his hand from her mouth, holding himself in readiness to prevent any attempt to scream.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?" he asked blithely. "Say it softly, my dear, or I may be driven to hurt you."

"What do you want, Mr. Curtis?" she gasped.

He eyed her sternly. "I'm here for Mrs. Leslie, whom 'tis plain you expected. You must give up the letters of hers you hold."

"Have you the money?" she asked eagerly.

"There will be no question of money, my dear," he answered coolly.

"Then you won't get the letters," she responded sharply. "They are worth 300 guineas to Mistress Leslie, I'll warrant."

"They will be worth nothing at all to you in gaol," he said menacingly.

She laughed. "You can't gaol me, Mr. Curtis; I know

that now. Mistress Leslie will not have the affair published."

"Peste! You baggage!" he muttered. "You know more than I bargained." He drew a bow at a venture. "There's more than one indictment against you, my dear. When did you steal Mrs. Leslie's letters?"

"I never stole 'em. That Tom Hunter lodged with my aunt, and when he died she took his boxes to pay his account. She gave me these letters; she didn't know what to do with them. But I never used them, Mr. Curtis, till I——"

"Till you learned their value, eh?"

"No, sir," she answered angrily, "till I needed the money. Tell Mistress Leslie to pay my price and I'll give up the letters."

Tim was nonplussed. He made a second attempt to terrorise her. "I can have you gaoled for robbing Lady Wimbourne if you won't be reasonable," he threatened.

Again she laughed scornfully. "Not you. Miss Winnington promised I should go free if I told the truth."

"And you lied like a trooper," he said angrily.

"Maybe," she laughed, "but Miss Winnington doesn't know it."

Timothy's fingers itched to shake the girl, but he kept his temper with difficulty. He was resolved to gain possession of Mrs. Leslie's letters at all costs, but he wished also to learn the name of the man the girl shielded; he feared that forcible measures which might possibly gain him the letters would destroy all hope of success in his second undertaking. Moreover, he wished, if possible, to avoid the hateful necessity of maltreating a woman. He played his last card.

"There's one other matter, child, in which it seems your pretty fingers have meddled," he said slowly. "How did

you learn my life was in danger when you wrote to warn me, eh?"

Her face blanched suddenly. "I never wrote to you," she muttered.

"Lies are of small service, my dear, when the handwriting tallies," he said coolly, tapping her letter to Mrs. Leslie. "You wrote to me—I wish to know at whose dictation."

"I'll not tell you," she said shortly, eyeing him furtively.

"Ah! but you shall, girl," he said, grasping her wrist tightly. "Was it the same man who taught you to rob your mistress?"

She winced under his grasp and set her little mouth obstinately. "I'll tell you nothing. He saved your life."

"Hum! We will say he did his best. But there are some, Martha, who would owe him no gratitude for that. Some who, if they knew what he had done, would make the consequences to him demmed unpleasant, my dear."

She started. They were the very words Rory had used when he warned her to keep the matter secret. A look of fear crept into her eyes. Timothy noted it, and drove home the thrust.

"You won't tell me his name, eh? Well, I warrant there are others who would have small difficulty in guessing it if they knew you were his mouthpiece. Shall I tell them what I know, Martha?"

She looked at him with frightened eyes. She could not tell how much he knew, nor how much those other men of whom Rory had warned her would guess, did they know her the accomplice. The whole affair was a mystery to her; she only knew that Rory had bidden her keep secret at all costs the fact that she had written the letter of warning to Mr. Curtis.

Timothy watched her frightened face with rising hopes.

"Am I to tell them—Sir Tracy, Lord Robert Dacre, and the rest—that it was you who spoiled their plan, eh?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No," she muttered.

"Then you must be reasonable, my dear, and tell me this man's name," he argued.

A look of suspicion crossed her face. "I'll not. You would use it against him."

"What! When he saved my life?"

She nodded. "You would. I'll tell you nothing."

"Very well, then I tell Sir Tracy what I know," he said, turning toward the door.

She caught his hand. "No, no, Mr. Curtis," she cried, "not that."

"Then will you be reasonable?"

She hesitated. "I—I'll never tell you his name," she muttered, "but—if you will keep close about my warning you, I—I'll give you Mrs. Leslie's letters for—£100."

Timothy laughed. "For nothing, Martha. They are useless to you. Who would believe in forged letters offered for sale by a proved spy? You will give them to me for nothing."

"You—you're very hard, Mr. Curtis," she sobbed.

"Egad! my dear, not near so hard as you deserve," he answered coolly. "Am I to have those letters?"

She looked at him furtively, measuring his resolution. Then she gave a sigh of helplessness. "Yes, you shall have them, if you will give me your word you will not ask me again to tell on the man who made me write to you."

Timothy hesitated. If he gave his word it would close one channel to the truth he sought, for it seemed clear that

the spy was the same man as the dictator of her letter to himself. On the other hand, his hold on the girl was very slight, it was a pure game of bluff that he played; if he left her now he would lose all chance of gaining Mrs. Leslie's letters. He had taken her service upon him; her claims must come first.

"Very well," he said, "it is a fair bargain. I leave you alone for the future if you give me those letters."

He held out his hand. Martha looked at him doubtfully. Then she put her hand inside her bodice and drew from her under-pocket two packets of letters. She held them from him.

"You've given me your word, Mr. Curtis?"

"I have; do you trust me?"

"Oh, yes," she said simply, "I trust you."

She handed him the letters. He looked at them carefully; they were in Mrs. Leslie's handwriting, but signed by some love name. "Are these all, girl?" he asked sternly; "remember, if you play me false I have still power to break my word."

She nodded. "You have them all. You—you might give me something for them, Mr. Curtis."

He laughed and pocketed them. "Were they your dowry, eh? Well, here are three guineas and a deal more than they are worth."

She took the money eagerly, seemingly content with her bargain.

"You have my word not to trouble you further, Martha," continued Tim, "but if ever you have a mind to tell me who made you write that letter to me, 'tis information for which I would pay you handsomely."

She shook her head. "I will never tell you, he——"

She stopped suddenly and lifted her head to listen, her face alight with eagerness. A step was approaching the door.

Tim turned quickly. " 'Twill be the fellow himself," he muttered.

The door opened and Rory Winnington appeared.

He looked from Martha to Timothy with a sharp, questioning glance, then he broke into his familiar low, mocking laugh.

"Tim, Tim," he said, shaking his head reproachfully, "you are poaching. This little piece of pink and white is my preserve."

Tim did not answer. He stared at the girl, who stood gazing on Rory with a look of adoration in her blue eyes. Rory crossed to her side and patted her cheek.

"She's a liberal little lady, Tim," he said, laughing; "and a man does well to keep his hand and eyes on such, eh?"

Tim faced him squarely, a strange suspicion was growing in his mind. "I'm here on business," he said shortly. "I'm here to ask this girl who dictated the letter she wrote warning me of Stavely's plot to kidnap me."

"Ah!" said Rory with interest, "and has she told you?"

"No—no," said the girl quickly, "I never——"

Rory held up his hand, smiling. "Don't talk so fast, my pretty, 'tis wearisome. Why do you want the information, Tim?"

"Because I hold it will give me the clue to the spy whose guilt I bear."

Rory laughed. "The wrong scent again, Tim. I dictated the letter."

"You?" said Tim slowly.

Rory watched him closely. "Yes, I. You look plaguy

surprised, Tim. It's not the only time I've wasted to save you from the consequences of your—er—inquisitiveness."

"No," said Tim significantly, "it is not."

Suddenly Rory's manner changed. "Faith, Tim!" he cried quickly, "what the mischief are you doing here at all? Haven't you yet learned what a plaguy unwholesome spot this is for you? Why, good Heavens! You will have all of them down on you in ten minutes. And I warn you if they get their hands on you again there'll be no second opportunity for cat-walking on the tiles. They will shovel you out of the world without waiting for a parson to smooth your passage."

Tim's hand rested on his sword. "I know," he said calmly. "I'll not be trapped again. I am going in a minute——"

"In a minute?" Rory shook his head. "You'll go now, Tim, if you want to get out, and lucky you'll be to escape. Did Rigby see you come in? He's marking you."

"He wouldn't know me if he did," said Tim, picking up his cloak. "I came cloaked and hooded like a wandering beauty."

Rory burst out laughing. "Faith, Tim, you go the pace! But that won't serve you with the others; you stride like a drunken ostrich. Come on with me, I'll take you out." He slipped his arm through Tim's and pulled him toward the door. Tim hung back.

"Wait," he said quickly; "I want to know——"

"Whatever it be you must wait till to-morrow to ask it," cried Rory impatiently, "or I warn you, you'll soon know what all the philosophers on earth are seeking to discover. Come on, man. Is Rigby below, Martha?"

"No; there's no one there but the old missus."

Half unwillingly Tim yielded to Rory's insistence and allowed himself to be hurried downstairs. The house sounded strangely empty and deserted. At the door of the tavern Rory peered out into the silent street and nodded reassuringly.

"The way is clear. Now be off with you, Tim, and don't put your inquisitive nose in here again. I'm devilish tired of playing the nursemaid to you."

With a laugh Rory went back into the tavern and Tim walked slowly away down the street, thinking deeply over what had passed. He had gone a few yards when he saw a man approaching through the gloom of the dimly lit alley. With a new-born prudence he stepped back into the shadow of a doorway, and waited till he should pass. The man came within a few feet of his hiding-place and then paused beneath a hanging lamp to study a paper he held in his hand. The light fell upon his features and Tim recognised Josiah Smith.

His first impulse was to hurry forward and accost the man whom he had sought all day, but on second thoughts he drew back into the shadow and waited. The study of the paper, the furtive walk, suggested an appointed meeting in the neighbourhood; Tim had a mind to learn with whom Pelham's agent sought secret interview. It might be that here lay the clue he sought. He resolved to spy upon the spy.

Josiah passed along without noticing the lurking figure in the doorway; he was intent upon studying the fronts of the houses. At the door of the "Cock and Bull" tavern he paused, peered up at the sign, dimly lighted by the hanging oil lamp, then entering quickly closed the door behind him.

Timothy stepped out of his concealment, his heart beating with excitement, suspicion deepening in his mind. He stared up at the tavern. All the front windows were dark with the exception of the bar, and that, he could see, was empty. He turned down the passage at the side of the inn and walked round to the back. A lamp still burned in the room he had just quitted; he saw a girl's figure outlined against the light. Presently she stepped to the window and leaning her elbows on the lower half of the shutters stared out into the darkness. He could not see her face, but he guessed it to be Martha and from her attitude he concluded she was alone.

He went back down the side of the tavern and now a light appeared in an upper window looking on to the alley; in all probability it was here that the interview was to be held.

A water-butt stood at the corner, and a gutter ran from it along the wall some way below the lighted window. Timothy marked it. He scrambled up the butt, grasped the sill of a window above it, reached out to the shutter of the next window and steadying himself by this crept along the gutter, face to the wall, till he was on a level with the lighted casement. Cautiously he lifted his head and peered into the room.

The window was open and uncurtained; a high-backed settle obscured his view of the occupants of the apartment, but he could see their shadows thrown upon the opposite wall. He was able to distinguish Josiah, who stood leaning on a table; the other figure was evidently sprawling back in a chair, his blurred shadow upon the wall was unrecognisable.

Josiah was speaking when Tim reached the window.

"The arms are hidden in Madame Grieve's house, behind

the wainscot in the upper room? This is most valuable information, sir. We will have a raid on the place to-night. I am to understand you will convey to his lordship the names of those concerned in the conspiracy in a few days when the list is complete?"

The second shadow nodded; he was evidently occupied in lighting his pipe. Tim muttered an oath of impatience. At any moment he might be observed from the street or from a neighbouring window; he could not long hope to maintain his post of observation. Yet until Josiah's companion moved from behind the settle, or spoke, he had no means of ascertaining his identity. Josiah spoke again.

"I am directed by his lordship to give you this, sir," he said. A purse was handed across the table and pocketed in silence by the man in the chair. Josiah drew a letter from his pocket.

"Concerning the other matter about which you wrote me, sir," he continued, "I do not think his lordship has any third agent here in his employ. The letters you mention, if indeed stolen, have been taken by some one working independently. But for Mr. Curtis, I can assure you he has no hand in this affair. The matter was broached to him by Lord Pelham, and I understand he rejected the offer in the most—er—the most offensive terms."

Then at last the second shadow drew his pipe from his lips. A low laugh of amusement broke the silence.

"Egad!" he said, "I'd have given a fortune to hear the interview between the foolish knave and the honest fool. Curtis has a rare tongue."

Even as the words were spoken a sharp, rending sound echoed down the alley; the gutter on which Timothy stood gave way beneath his weight, and he jumped backward just

in time to escape a fall. He landed on his feet and turning away ran up the alley under cover of the darkness.

He heard an exclamation from the window above, but he did not look round. He had learned enough. The laugh, the voice were unmistakable. Lord Pelham's spy was none other than Rory Winnington.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HEART OF A SPY

AFTER his first fierce rage at the black treachery of the man, Timothy found his anger against Rory evaporating. It seemed impossible to urge against this lovable vagabond the stern judgment merited by any man less openly unprincipled and reckless. Moreover, Rory had persistently urged his assurance of the other's innocence, and had twice risked his life to save him. Had there been only himself to consider, Timothy would have been almost persuaded to conceal the secret he had discovered and leave Rory to the judgment of his own conscience.

But his share in the affair was the least consideration. After what had passed he owed it to Celia Winnington to prove his honesty at all costs; it would surely be chivalry run mad deliberately to take on his own shoulders the guilt of another man, even though that man were her brother. He must unmask the traitor to the Jacobites, but he hoped it might yet prove possible to keep the knowledge of Rory's guilt from his sisters.

The fate of the conspirators lay in his hands at last. He alone knew of the dangers that threatened them, the proposed raid on Madame Grieve's house, and the betrayal that hung over their heads.

Timothy was human. For ten days these men had treated him with contumely, had plotted against his liberty, threatened his life; there lurked a certain whimsical humour in the thought that it was to him the Fates had intrusted the

saving of their necks. Timothy undoubtedly found much consolation in the possession of this eminently satisfactory vengeance.

He realised that he had no time to lose if he would warn the Jacobites. Though he now suspected that Rory's haste to send him away from the tavern had been merely in order to clear the way for Josiah, it was still probable the conspirators might visit the suspected house later in the evening and be trapped. He waited only to despatch Mrs. Leslie's letters by Simon, and then strode off to the Bear Inn, where Charles Rathborne had his lodging.

He scarcely hoped to find Rathborne at his rooms, but good luck attended him. Charles had just returned from a rout, and was changing his coat preparatory to joining a gaming party at the Christopher Inn. His face hardened when he recognised his visitor, and he gave him curt greeting.

"What are you seeking here, Curtis? I had thought you had learned by this time to avoid our company."

"Like the devil when there are more than three of you together," answered Tim coolly. "But, egad! I find one or two of you at a time vastly refreshing company."

"What d'ye want?" asked Charles shortly.

"Merely to set your noses on the right scent for once. I have told you till I am tired of telling that I'm not the man you seek. Now I'm here to prove it."

"We are as weary of hearing your assurances as you profess to be of making them," answered Rathborne. "And we are like to grow as weary of your proofs. Wimbourne has told me of the affair last Saturday with the girl Martha."

Tim sat down astride a chair and put up his glass.

"Heaven has only blessed me with a limited amount of patience, Charles," he drawled. "Don't draw too freely on the store. Either listen to me now with reasonable credence, or I swear I'll hold my tongue and Jamie's boy may whistle for your help."

"What do you mean?" asked Charles quickly.

"Pelham's agent has received information that certain Jacobites have hidden arms and ammunition behind the wainscot in Madame Grieve's house. The place will be raided to-night."

"Damnation!" cried Charles, starting to his feet.

"Exactly," drawled Tim. "Plaguy annoying, isn't it?"

Charles strode across the room and faced him, his voice was shaking with passion. "You hound! You are the man we have to thank for this. By heaven! Curtis, I'll kill you before another hour is past."

Timothy put up his hand soothingly. "You men of Jamie's are so demmed hotheaded," he complained reproachfully. "Use your intelligence, Charles. If I had betrayed you, should I be here now to warn you of the raid?"

"Yes, when it is obviously too late to prevent it," answered Rathborne sharply.

Tim stared at him a moment in silence. "Egad!" he said admiringly, "you have the choicest conception of a villain, Charles."

Rathborne turned away with an oath. Tim stretched out his hand and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't you intend to profit by the warning? Are you going to do nothing?"

"Do!" cried Charles savagely. "What is there to do? We are ruined. We can't prevent the raid, and we cannot

possibly move the ammunition now. It must go. Nothing can be done."

"The others can be warned."

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "To what purpose? All Bath will know in an hour or two. No one goes to the house to-night, and it were wiser that Marie Grieve should go as usual to-morrow. She will have no difficulty in proving her ignorance. It's well known she was only in the place in the daytime."

Tim dropped his glass and swung it idly to and fro.

"It seems my news has fallen devilish flat," he said coolly.

"'Tis monstrous discouraging to find such a plaguy lack of interest taken in one's information."

Charles eyed him doubtfully. "Have you given Pelham our names?" he asked.

"*I!* Have *I?*" cried Tim, exasperated. "My faith! but you try the patience of a saint. It's not I whom you need fear. You've a traitor in your own company, and if you don't lay him by the heels to-night he'll hand you all over to Pelham for one thousand guineas."

"A traitor in our company!" cried Charles. "Nonsense! Whom?"

"Rory Winnington."

"Rory!" Charles fell back a step and stared at him in absolute unbelief. "You accuse Rory of betraying us?" He laughed suddenly. "'Pon my soul, Curtis, I did not believe even you capable of offering such a crazy tale for our belief. Rory! Why, he has been Tracy's right-hand man in the affair from the beginning. He was down at Bristol all March organising the shipment of arms."

"That may be," said Tim shortly. "It seems he has changed his politics. An hour ago he told Pelham's agent

the secret of Madame Grieve's house, and promised to forward a full list of the Jacobite conspirators in a few days."

Charles shook his head. "I don't believe you," he said bluntly.

Timothy flushed. "I don't allow any man to give me the lie," he said sharply. "If I were not so demmed sorry to see you all with your necks in the noose, I swear I wouldn't raise another finger to help you."

Suddenly his manner changed. He put his hand on Rathborne's shoulder. "Charles," he said earnestly, "have I been such a bad friend to you all, that you should take Rory's word against mine now? I'm Hanoverian, I'm Whig, but demme! if I've ever done anything to deserve that you should hold me such a contemptible villain as I must be if there's no truth in Rory's guilt."

Charles hesitated. Then he picked up his hat and crossed to the door. "You shall come with me to Rory now," he said shortly, "and accuse him to his face."

"I ask nothing fairer," said Tim, with alacrity. "I've no proof to offer save my word; you shall judge between us."

The two men walked to Rory's lodging in silence. Tim was debating the best way to bring home his accusation, since he knew the traitor was not one to be easily taken off his guard. But Rathborne's silence covered a deeper struggle. For in his soul temptation warred against his honour, since the proving of Timothy's innocence meant the loss to him of that which he held dearer than his life, the hope of winning Celia. He prayed in his heart that justice might guide him, knowing himself to be so blinded by love.

A light was burning in Rory's room when they reached

the door of the house in Cheap Street, where he lodged, but his servant met them at the foot of the stairs and assured them his master was not at home.

"Where is he?" asked Charles sharply.

"At the Christopher Inn, sir," answered the man slowly. But even as he spoke Rory's laugh floated down to them from the window above.

"You insolent liar," cried Charles angrily, "make way." Still the man barred the passage, looking scared.

"Mr. Winnington is engaged, sir," he persisted. "I am to admit no one."

"Our business is too urgent to wait," answered Tim shortly. "Light us up, fellow."

The man stood a moment hesitating, then turned and running hurriedly up the stairs, darted into his master's room, shutting the door behind him.

"Plague on the rascal! What does he mean by his insolence?" said Charles angrily. "Shall we go up, Curtis?"

Timothy nodded. They stumbled up the dark staircase and knocked at the door of Rory's room. A sleepy voice bade them enter. They found Rory alone sprawling on a couch, drawn near to the window, paper and pencil in hand. He looked up and nodded a welcome.

"Here, Tim, you've a monstrous pretty wit for stringing verses, give me a rhyme for 'Cupid,'" he drawled, staring at his paper. "I'm crazing my wits over a sonnet I vowed I would write for Lady de Putren. The first three lines would have driven the little hunchback Pope wild with envy, but demme! if I can think of a fourth to equal them."

Charles looked across at Timothy doubtfully, it seemed so impossible to believe this handsome, smiling dilettante the

traitor he had declared him to be. Timothy's face hardened.

Rory looked at them curiously. "Egad! you are both monstrous solemn," he said. "What's amiss? Listen to this:

"When Venus from her playful boy his barbèd arrows stole,
She gave him into Vulcan's care his wildness to control.
But e'en the horny-handed god could not control young
Cupid:
Two hearts he forged——

Have you read anything to equal that in all Pope's folios?"

"We've come on urgent affairs, Rory," said Charles impatiently. "You must give us your attention."

"What the plague d'ye want?" asked Rory plaintively.

"Can't you see I'm demmed busy? 'Cupid—stupid—droopèd.' 'Droopèd' might serve at a pinch."

With an exclamation of impatience Charles leaned over him, snatched the paper from his hand, and threw it, a crumpled ball, out of the window. Rory sat upright, eyeing him indignantly.

"Confound you, Charles, that's my sonnet! I shall forget the blessed thing if I don't write it down again. 'When Venus first—' How did it go?"

He reached out to the table for another piece of paper and began to scribble. Tim laid a strong hand on his wrist.

"Rory," he said sternly, "the game's up. I've brought Charles Rathborne here to tell him that you are in Pelham's service, bribed to betray the Jacobite conspirators to the government."

The paper in Rory's hand shook slightly, but his face

did not change. He gazed up at Timothy in mild amazement.

"Ah!" he said coolly, "why do you tell him that?"

"Curtis claims he can prove it," said Charles, eyeing him closely.

"Does he? Now, that's demmed interesting," drawled Rory. "What are your proofs, Tim? Has Pelham peached? Have you found papers in my hand to the government? Has any one seen me playing the traitor? Out with your proofs, man."

"I heard you an hour since betraying the secret of Madame Grieve's house to Lord Pelham's agent," said Tim resolutely.

"You heard me? You didn't see me? Where did you hear me?"

"At the 'Cock and Bull' tavern."

Rory shook his head. "A mighty lame tale, Tim. Go home and think of more detail."

"I can swear you were there."

Rory smiled. "Well, how many witnesses do you want to swear I was not, eh? I'll produce them."

Tim stood silent thinking, still grasping the other's wrist. Rory took the pen in his other hand and went on with his scribbling.

"I don't blame you, Tim," he said coolly. "I'd have done the same myself, only—" he laughed, "bless you, Tim! I would have thought of a more convincing lie."

Timothy smiled. "I don't doubt it," he said drily. "Truth is always simpler than fiction." He turned to Rathborne: "Charles, you have only our two words to go by," he said quietly. "But remember this; you hold no clearer proof against me than I hold against Rory. Fur-

ther, I could have no means of knowing where your arms were hid, yet that knowledge has been betrayed."

Rathborne hesitated. "Rory, do you deny this charge?" he asked slowly.

"Deny it! Egad! yes, as often as you like. 'Two hearts he forged at—' Tim, what the plague does rhyme with 'Cupid'?"

Timothy dropped his wrist with a despairing gesture. Rory laughed.

"Not in the vein for poesy, eh? You should practise it, Tim. 'Tis demmed good training for the invention."

Timothy's eyes hardened; he was losing patience.

"It's no good, Rory," he said. "I know you to be the traitor; proving it is only a question of time. But for Charles here, and the others, time's a consideration. They cannot let you go free under suspicion, you know too much."

"I've a plaguy short memory when it's convenient," laughed Rory. "Let them console themselves with that."

"Have you forgotten that it was you who warned me of Stavely's kidnapping, you who rescued me from Marie Grieve's house?"

Charles started. "Is that the truth?" he asked sharply.

"No," said Rory coolly. "Tim's invention is improving. He'll find me a rhyme for 'Cupid' presently."

But Charles Rathborne was shaken by Tim's quiet firmness.

"If it was you who rescued Curtis," he began, "it was——"

"Demmed ungrateful of Curtis to mention it," interrupted Rory cheerfully. "I agree with you, Charles."

Timothy crossed to the bureau. "I claim the right to search through your papers," he said shortly.

Rory laughed. "You'll find them mighty uninteresting." He detached a key from his fob and threw it across to Tim. "Read what you like," he said coolly.

Charles joined in the search. Together they hunted through the bureau and all other available hiding-places for papers. They found nothing except a copy of the letter from McFee which Tracy Wimbourne had received the previous week. Poems, bills, and billet-doux were there in abundance, but nothing to throw light upon the supposed treachery.

Rory lay back at his ease and watched them smilingly.

"Dear, dear, Tim!" he said, "nothing to be found? How bedad annoying!"

Timothy looked round. "The inner room," he said, crossing to the door.

Rory sat upright suddenly. "No," he said sharply, "demmed if you shall! I'll have no more of your interference. Leave my bedroom alone, Tim."

Timothy tried the door; it was locked. He turned to Rory and faced him with a dangerous light in his eyes.

"Give me the key," he demanded sharply.

"Not I," laughed Rory. "What! you'd intrude on the privacy of a bachelor? Lud! gentlemen, you're marvellous indacent to suggest it."

He rose and lounged between the two men and the inner door. "I'm plaguy weary of this comedy," he drawled; "be off, both of you, and let me finish my sonnet. 'Cupid—droopèd—quadruped.' Gad! 'quadruped's' a bedad tasty word. What do you say to it, Tim?"

"You hand me that key or I swear I'll break in the door," said Tim sharply. His temper was roused at last.

Charles Rathborne intervened. "Don't play the fool, Rory. Either let us search your rooms, or we draw conclusions that you are hiding something. This is a matter of life and death; there's no time for scruples."

Rory eyed him queerly. "You take my refusal to let you ransack my rooms as proof of my guilt, eh?"

"We don't leave here till we are satisfied that you have nothing to conceal," answered Rathborne resolutely.

Rory stepped back toward the door. "Then devise some other mode of satisfying yourselves; you don't enter this room."

With a sudden exclamation of exasperation Charles threw his arms round Rory, pinioning him.

"Now, Curtis—force the door," he said sharply.

For a second Rory struggled fiercely; but his strength was nothing compared with Rathborne's. He gave up the attempt to free himself. A queer light dawned in his eyes, a smile almost of self-mockery curled his lips.

"Very well," he said quietly. "Come away from that door, Tim; I give in. You are right; I sold the information about the arms to Pelham's agent this evening; I'm in his pay to spy on the Jacobites."

There was a moment's dead silence; then Charles's voice, deep with indignation and contempt, broke the stillness.

"You d—— traitor!"

Rory shrugged his shoulders. "Comments on my conduct are not asked for, Charles," he said coolly.

Charles looked at him with a hopeless contempt. "When did you take up the affair?"

"Last month. 'Tis possible I might have played Pelham

false in the end and spared some of you the noose; I'd no wish to hang you all."

"Where are Tracy's papers?" asked Charles quickly.

"Ah! I wish I knew," said Rory. "I was too late there. The nest had been robbed before I reached it. Have you got them by any chance, Tim?"

Charles turned to Timothy suddenly and held out his hand. "We owe you apologies, Tim," he said huskily. He gave away his last hope of winning Celia with this admission of Timothy's innocence.

Rory looked from one to the other with shrewd questioning glance. "Well," he drawled, "now you have the truth, what are you going to do with it—and with me?"

Timothy looked doubtfully across at Charles. "That is your affair," he said, "I've no quarrel with him. But I suppose you must have him silenced."

Charles nodded. "Bob and Tracy must decide. They may ship him off to Paris in your stead to await the Prince's decision. Perhaps they'll want—er—shorter measures."

Rory threw himself back in a chair and idly fingered his pistol which lay on the table; Charles moved across and moved it from under his hand. Rory laughed softly.

"Charles," he said suddenly, "what's the price of your silence?"

Rathborne shook his head. This man's betrayal had ruined the work for which they had risked their lives; he had no pity for him.

"I'd give you my word to meddle no further in the matter," said Rory slowly. "Or I could lead Pelham on a wild-goose chase."

Rathborne showed no signs of relenting. Rory eyed him eagerly.

"You won't trust me again, eh? Well—you're wise." He bent his head and examined the buttons on his cuff; his face was flushed. "You must clear Tim," he continued slowly. "Perhaps Bob and the rest must be told. But—demme! Charles, I'd be plaguy grateful if you could keep the truth from—my sisters. They—Celia—has such a marvellous belief in my honesty. I'd as lief she never learned the—what I've done."

"For my part," said Timothy quickly, "I hold with Rory. She never shall be told."

"Ay! but she will hear, if 'tis known. Women—bless their hearts—hear everything. You don't see your way, Charles, to keeping it close?"

Rathborne shook his head resolutely. His stern Scotch honesty knew no pity for a traitor.

Rory sat a moment gazing silently into the night. "Out of the sunshine!" he muttered, with a wistful smile.

He turned to Rathborne. "Charles," he said gravely, "there's one price, I take it, would buy your silence. If you will give me back my pistol I'll pay it now."

Rathborne started. "You mean——?"

"Dead men tell no tales; therefore no tales are told about them. If I—er—disappear there will be no need to publish the cause."

The two men stood silent. Rory looked up questioningly. "Well," he asked, "is my price acceptable?"

"Yes," said Charles gravely, "we will speak no evil of the dead."

He hesitated, then continued quickly: "But it must not be done here; that is impossible."

Rory shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "As you will. I will go with you half a mile down the London Road; that

will serve, and the footpads can bear the blame. Let me write one letter, then I am ready."

He picked up the paper on which he had scribbled his sonnet, wrote a few lines on the back; then folded and addressed it, and laid it on the table.

"Now," he said quietly, "I am ready to go with you."

"No, Rory, no! I cannot endure it!"

The cry rang out in a woman's anguished voice. The inner door was flung wide, and Dorothy Smallshaw appeared on the threshold.

Tim started back with an exclamation of surprise. Rory turned and looked at her, a smile of tender amusement on his lips.

"My dear," he said, shaking his head reproachfully, "you should be more careful of your reputation. I have been at—er—the greatest pains to preserve your privacy."

She flung herself on her knees beside his chair, and caught his arm. "I know—I know. Ah! Rory, I have heard all; but you must not, you shall not put an end to your life."

He took her hand caressingly. "My dear child, it is customary to hang a spy—with insult. These gentlemen have granted me a pleasanter mode of exit."

"Ah! no—no! Why must it be at all?"

"Every man has his weakness, Dorothy, and must pay for it. Mine is my reputation."

"Yes, I know," she cried piteously. "And you don't think of me, Rory?"

"Of you?" He laughed softly. "Dear heart! Bath is full of vagabonds. In a year I shall be but a memory to you."

She did not attempt to argue with him; she turned to Timothy.

"In an hour we should be on our way to Gretna," she said simply, offering the strongest plea she could.

"Yes," said Rory, "a marvellous unpleasant interruption to our wedding journey, is it not, Dorothy?"

"Mr. Curtis—" pleaded Dorothy, holding out her hands. Timothy crossed to Rathborne. "Charles," he said quickly, "we must devise some other way. It is impossible to insist on his death now."

Rathborne shook his head. "There is no other way," he said resolutely.

"Gad!" muttered Tim, "you're a hard man, Charles."

Rory gently raised Dorothy to her feet. "Let Curtis take you home, child," he said tenderly. "Your presence here is demmed embarrassing for Charles Rathborne."

But Dorothy shook off his hand and turned to face Rathborne, her eyes blazing with anger. "You shall either spare his life, Sir Charles, or take mine, too," she cried. "I know as much of your plots as he does. If you touch a hair of his head, Lord Pelham shall know what I know before a day has passed."

Rory broke into a sudden soft laugh of admiration: "Bravo, Dorothy! Egad! you have him there. But you forget, my dear—my reputation."

Rathborne stood silent, staring moodily at the floor. Timothy put his hand on his shoulder. "Come what may of it, Charles," he said resolutely, "the man must live."

There was a pause. At last Rathborne lifted his head, his resolution taken.

"There's one alternative, Winnington. Ride with me to Bristol to-night, take ship to the Colonies, and never set foot in England again. If you do this only Tracy and Bob Dacre need learn the truth."

"The Colonies!" said Rory, with a grimace. "Demmed uncivilised places!"

"If you return to England," continued Charles, "or if you play us false, I will publish your treachery, and have you hounded out of the society of gentlemen."

Rory flushed. "I can't call you to account for your language, Charles, but you're bedad free with your tongue."

"Is it to be America, or a longer journey?" asked Charles curtly.

Rory turned to Dorothy. "I'd as lief taste cold steel here as go to the Colonies—alone," he said softly.

She put her hands in his. "I will go with you, Rory," she said resolutely.

Timothy started forward. "No! I will not have that. You are in my uncle's care, Miss Smallshaw."

She wheeled round and faced him in a fury. "Mr. Curtis, you dare to prevent me?"

Rory laughed and patted her arm. "Tut! child, Tim's right. Demmed improper notion of yours!"

He looked down into her eyes and smiled. She put her arm about his neck. "I will come," she whispered softly, "to the world's end if you want me. What is it to me what you have done?"

Rory looked across at Charles. "Five minutes, gentlemen," he said entreatingly.

Charles nodded. He and Timothy drew back into the window, and left the two whispering together.

"A frigate sails to-morrow," said Charles. "I will see him away and return as quickly as may be. Be advised, Tim, keep house to-morrow. This loss of the arms will drive the Jacobites desperate. But you shall be cleared of all suspicion when I return." He hesitated a moment, then

he laid his hand on Timothy's arm. "Celia Winnington loves you, Tim," he said huskily. "I'm glad—for her sake—the accusation against you is disproved. There's no man worthy of her, but—you'll make her happy."

Tim looked out into the night, his eyes glowed. "Heaven helping me, Charles, I will love and serve her all my days," he said softly.

"Come, Charles, boot, saddle, and away," cried Rory briskly.

Rathborne turned to him. "Are you ready?" he asked curtly. "Then I'll send your man for horses." He left the room to make preparations for their ride.

Rory turned to Tim. His gravity had vanished; his eyes danced with eagerness and excitement.

"So it's westward ho, eh, Tim? Egad! Geordie must look to his laurels. Why shouldn't Prince Lackland lay hold on America? Faith! we'll have stirring times there before our beards are grey. The notion takes me amazingly."

Timothy looked across at Dorothy; her eyes were sparkling with excitement as she listened to Rory's talk. Tim's suspicions were awakened; but it was not his affair to curb the spirits of runaway heiresses.

Presently Rathborne returned. "All's ready," he said, looking to the priming of his pistols. "Your mails shall follow you, Winnington. If you slip me, you know the consequences."

"Take Dorothy home, Tim," said Rory. He kissed her hand; they looked again into each other's eyes, then with a little laugh she drew away her hand and preceded Tim out of the room.

Rory turned to Timothy; his face grew grave and wistful. "Tim," he said slowly, "you—you will take care of Celia?"

She loves you, and she—egad! Tim, she's the most honest soul alive. I'd have died rather than have her lose her faith in me. Let her always believe in my love for her."

"She'll never hear a word of this from me, Rory."

Rory held out his hand. For a perceptible moment Timothy hesitated; then he shook it heartily and followed Dorothy. He was no man to judge harshly of another's trips.

But Rory stood a moment silent, staring down at his hand. His face was flushed, his lips drawn tight together.

"An honest gentleman!" he muttered slowly. "Now betwixt him and a scoundrel there was a great gulf fixed."

He gave a quick sigh, threw back his head defiantly, and followed Rathborne out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XX

THE DARK OF THE MOON

THE gossips of Bath who gathered at the baths and the Pump Room the following morning had ample subject for conversation. Miss Dorothy Smallshaw, the beauty of the hour, had fled in the night, none knew whither; Mr. Rory Winnington had likewise disappeared; rumours, conjectures, conclusions were rife. The matter had proved enough to serve Bath with talk for a week, had not another and more enthralling item of news arisen to turn men's thoughts speedily from so commonplace a matter as a runaway match.

Here was conspiracy in their midst! Arms hidden in a house! Gunpowder stowed behind innocent-seeming wainscot! Who could tell what dread plot was afoot to overthrow established order, to upset the constitution, and to murder innocent citizens in their beds? Fair bosoms fluttered with anxious fears. Nervous and bejewelled dowagers ordered their horses for flight. Politicians clacked their tongues; wits wrote letters; the grave city fathers groaned under the weight of their responsibilities. Men eyed one another askance, suspicion was in every mind. For here was a plot, plain enough; yet no trace of the plotters—only an indignantly bewildered little French coiffeuse with reputation so stainless that none could lift a stone to fling at her.

Verily, indeed, Bath had matter enough for gossip that sunny 25th of July. Greater still would have been the ex-

citement could the gossips have known that on that very morning the ill-fated Prince for whom the conspiracy was hatched had set foot at last in his native land.

In and out among the chattering groups strolled the conspirators, ready as any with conjectures and amazement. But who can tell what black rage seethed in their hearts at this betrayal of their plan? Who can guess what dark fears shadowed them at thought of the sword hanging over their heads?

At a small table at the back of Simpson's coffee-room Roger Lee, Lord Stavely and Mr. Seccombe sat breakfasting in moody silence. Lee's lips were drawn straight and tight, the man's ungovernable temper mastered him; he raged to be at the throat of the betrayer. His companions eyed him anxiously, fearing to talk lest in the heat of discussion he should lose what small restraint he had.

Presently Lord Robert and Marcus Ormonde entered. They paused at the door to speak with a little group of men passing out; then they settled down at a table near to Stavely's seat. The rooms were almost empty; no man tarried long in any place that morning; all hurried hither and thither in search of news.

Lord Robert leaned over Stavely's chair.

"That rattlepate Rory has gone off on some wild-goose chase just when he should have proved most useful," he grumbled. "Tracy has ridden off already to Bristol to set on foot negotiations for a fresh supply of arms. 'Tis all we can do until we hear from the Prince, or learn how we stand here, how much is known."

Lee muttered an oath of impatience. "All we can do!" he said angrily. "Is that damned traitor then to go unpunished?"

Lord Robert's eyes darkened. "No," he said shortly. "He shall pay the price of his betrayal. Give those two led-captains—Owen and Trickett—what they ask and leave it to them to take him to-night on his way back from the ball to his lodging. He will be unarmed; the Beau allows no swords in his kingdom. I myself will undertake, gentlemen, to bring him down to the Rooms. More—he shall be at the Orange Grove at half-past nine. I know the lure to draw him."

Marcus eyed him doubtfully. "Gad! Bob, don't let us draw women into this affair," he said shortly.

"There is no need they should know of it," answered Lord Robert impatiently. "Or, at most, only Lady Wimbourne, and her husband's life is at stake."

Marcus shook his head. "So the affair be arranged in a gentlemanly-like manner, I'm as willing as any to pay Curtis my dues. But demme if I will soil my fingers with any villain tricks compromising women."

Lord Robert stiffened. "You can safely leave that to me, Marcus," he said, "and remember again, we fight not for our own necks, but for the success of the Prince." And then quickly to Lee, "What would you have?"

"Plainly—a thrust in the dark, and an end to the whole affair."

"Cut-throat work?" asked Marcus slowly.

"None other is certain," answered Lee.

"What else does the damned traitor merit?" urged Stavely.

"There's no other way to silence him," muttered Seccombe.

There was a moment's dead silence. Then Lord Robert rose to his feet. "We give you *carte blanche*, Lee," he said quietly. He slipped his arm through Ormonde's and turned to leave the room. Marcus hesitated a moment; then with

a little shrug of his shoulders he allowed himself to be walked away.

"After all," he muttered, "every man must take his chance. And Tim Curtis is not to be caught napping."

It was three o'clock when Lord Robert waited on Adelaide Wimbourne to seek her help in his plan. At first he was denied admission, the servant declaring that his lady could see no one, but upon his urging the importance of his errand the man consented to take up his name. He reappeared immediately and ushered the visitor upstairs with a haste that bespoke the great anxiety of his mistress to receive her guest.

Lord Robert found Adelaide standing in the centre of the room, eagerly awaiting him. She almost ran to meet him, and clung to his hand in an agony of fear. He was shocked at the wildness of her air, the disorder of her appearance.

"Madam—madam, this will never do," he cried impatiently, when the servant had left the room. "You must control your fears. This disturbance is enough to centre the suspicions of the whole city upon Tracy."

She dropped his hand and turned away, making an effort to control herself. "You bring no fresh news?" she asked, in a low voice.

"None. And every hour's delay gives new hope. It would certainly seem that our names are still secret, since no attempt has been made to arrest us."

"But how long can we hope they will remain so?" she moaned.

"Come, Lady Wimbourne," he urged kindly, "indeed there is small cause for such immediate fears. Even if we be accused, the evidence against us can be but slight. Do

not give way to such unreasoning terror. Twenty-four hours ago and you were the bravest of us all."

"The blow had not fallen then; I did not realise the danger. But now—ah! Lord Robert, you cannot understand. You men have but your own necks to care about; I have Tracy's. 'Tis so hard to stand by and watch another's danger, having no power to help."

"You have that power, Lady Wimbourne; 'tis for that I come to ask."

She turned to him quickly. "You want my help? Ah! what can I do? I will do anything—anything—so it will save Tracy."

"Then dry your eyes, madam; quiet your fears, and listen to me. The only man outside our company who had power to betray us is Timothy Curtis——"

"Ah!" she interrupted quickly. "You are sure of that?"

"Whom else should we suspect? He knows what we are about. Our lives are in his hands and he goes free."

"But why does he go free?"

"He is too prudent, madam; we cannot lay hands on him. But we must have him to-night, or our safety will only be a question of hours." He hesitated, watching her closely. "It—er—it is here, madam," he said slowly, "we require your aid."

She looked at him doubtfully. "You mean——?"

"He must come down to the Rooms this evening, and keep a rendezvous at the Orange Grove at half-past nine o'clock. How can that be contrived?"

Adelaide turned from him abruptly and crossed to the window. "Why do you come to me?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Because you alone can help us."

"He will not come for my sake."

"No, madam. But you can bring him."

She hesitated. "Celia would never forgive me did she guess I had brought him to harm by such means," she said slowly.

His face hardened. "Has it gone so far as that? Then for her sake as well as Tracy's he must be removed."

"But not by such tools," she pleaded. "Ah! no—indeed, I cannot do it."

"'Pon my soul, Lady Wimbourne, I can contrive no other."

There was a short silence. He crossed to her side.

"I won't urge it, madam," he said gently. "I know the task is distasteful. I would never have suggested it were you not Tracy's wife—but we have learned to expect so much of you."

She lifted her eyes to his. "It would be for Tracy's sake," she said, arguing with herself.

"To save his life—and, it may be, your sister's happiness."

Again she stood silent for a minute. Then she bowed her head. "I do not think," she said simply, "Fate should ask so much of a woman."

"But you will do it, madam?"

"I have no choice."

"How will you contrive it?"

"Leave that to me. To bring him to the Rooms is a simple matter. For the rest, many couples venture into the gardens these hot evenings; it should be easy to induce him to walk with me to the Grove."

Lord Robert looked at her curiously; she spoke in a cold matter-of-fact tone; her face had grown hard and set. It

was as though she had once for all put womanly tenderness behind her and walked resolutely along the way she had chosen.

There was a sudden clash of chords in the adjoining room; Celia's voice, uplifted in a joyous melody, broke the stillness. A little quiver of pain crossed Adelaide's face.

"Perchance," she muttered, "this is the last day Celia will find the heart to sing."

Lord Robert winced. "Lady Wimbourne," he cried impatiently, "you must not think so—so brain-sickly. A girl's fancy—! What is that against a man's life? Against a prince's kingdom?"

"It may prove 'tis the worth of a girl's soul," she answered softly. Then her face hardened. "You are right, Lord Robert, I will think no more."

He took his leave, dissatisfied with her, with his errand, with life altogether. As he walked down the street, Celia's voice, singing joyously, rang in his ears. He hurried to the Christopher Inn to deaden the sound with the soft slip-slip of the cards. He hated the work he had set on foot, but for the sake of the Stuart he would let no woman turn him from his path.

"Celia," Adelaide said sharply, "I must speak to you about Mr. Curtis."

Seated at her harpsichord, Celia broke off in the middle of a song and looked up in surprise at her sister's tone.

"Why, Laidie, what has happened?" she cried quickly.

"Happened! Enough, I should hope. Do you go about with your ears closed that you have heard nothing?" cried Adelaide impatiently.

"Do you mean the report concerning Rory and Dorothy Smallshaw?" asked Celia, in bewilderment.

"No. What do Rory's mad doings concern us? Have you not heard of the discovery last night?"

"The arms hidden at Madame Grieve's house? Yes, truly, but how should that concern us—or Mr. Curtis?"

"Child—how blind you are! They were hid by the Jacobite conspirators, of whom Tracy is the chief."

Celia sprang to her feet, her face white with fear.

"Laidie, do you mean it? Has Tracy been betrayed?"

Tears rushed to Adelaide's eyes. "Who knows? He goes free as yet. But the hiding-place for the arms has been betrayed; the plans are ruined. At any hour the company may be arrested. It is clear the traitor has no mercy."

"The traitor—you mean——?"

"Mr. Curtis."

Celia's hands dropped stiffly to her side. "No—no—Laidie," she said, in a low, angry voice. "You are mistaken. It was not he who stole your papers; it is not he who has betrayed Tracy. There is some other spy in the company."

"Indeed? And who is he, pray? Has Mr. Curtis, perchance, told you his name among his other information?"

"No," faltered Celia, "he has not yet discovered him."

"Nor is he like to. Child, how lightly you are fooled. A look in the eyes and a tripping tongue, and every man is an angel to you."

Celia flushed crimson. "Laidie, I will not have you speak so. A touch of suspicion and you hold a man the blackest-hearted traitor. What proof can you give of Mr. Curtis's treachery?"

"More than you can give of his honour. He alone knew

where the papers were hid; Martha confessed to his theft; Lord Pelham told our uncle himself that this man took his bribe. What more do you need to be convinced? Have you forgotten the base of our accusation?"

Slowly the flush died from Celia's cheeks. She brushed her hand wearily across her brow. Her mouth quivered.

"I seem to have forgotten everything," she said unsteadily, "except——"

"Except the man's flattering tongue," interrupted Adelaide sharply. "Then awaken your recollection, child. Remember that this man who has bewitched you with his arts has ruined the Prince's cause here; has spied upon his friends, and holds in his hands the safety of Tracy—of Rory himself. E'en now he may be betraying them—even now Tracy's life may be at stake."

She broke off suddenly with a sob, and sinking into a chair, wept bitterly.

With a little cry of tenderness, Celia ran to her side and threw her arms about her. "Laidie—mavourneen—ah! do not cry," she pleaded. "Indeed, it can't be as you think. If—if Mr. Curtis has indeed disclosed the conspiracy (which I do not believe), he will never betray Tracy—his friend. Don't cry, Laidie."

Adelaide impatiently threw off the encircling arm.

"If—if——" she cried angrily; "you do not believe? You had rather see Tracy delivered to his death than raise a hand to help me to save him."

"Help you? Laidie, you know I would do anything to help you," cried Celia reproachfully. "What can I do?"

"You can bid Mr. Curtis attend the ball this evening; fix a rendezvous with him at the Orange Grove at half-past nine," said Adelaide, eyeing her closely.

Celia started. "I—I should do this?" she cried indignantly.

"He will venture for no other."

"But to what end, Adelaide?"

"To the end that he may meet with his deserts and be silenced," she answered shortly.

Celia stood looking down at her sister with a queer light in her eyes. "Laidie," she said gently, "you don't think what you are saying. Were he ten thousand times traitor, that were no reason we should turn traitor, too. I could not do this thing—you could not ask it of me."

"Yet I do ask it of you—for Tracy's sake."

"For Tracy's sake," Celia repeated slowly. She sank on her knees beside her sister, and took her hands. "Laidie, dearest," she said earnestly, "I would give my life for Tracy if I might, but not my honour. Tracy himself would not have it so."

Adelaide snatched her hands away. Terror and misery had made her brutal.

"Your honour—" she said scornfully, "'tis not your honour, miss, that holds you, but your love for this black-hearted spy."

Celia flushed. "I do love him," she said steadily. "Whether he be spy or no, I do love him. Yet if he be proved true I would deny his love could that serve Tracy, and if he be proved spy I would not lift a finger to save him from death; but I will not play the traitor were it to save the whole kingdom from ruin."

"Or your sister from despair," cried Adelaide bitterly.

Celia's eyes filled with tears. "Laidie, dearest, forgive me," she pleaded. "Indeed, I cannot do this thing. You know I do surely love Tracy, but——"

“What love is this that values honour more?”

“’Tis the only love worth the name, Laidie,” answered Celia steadily. “Love without honour is clay without soul. Dearest, we will strive, we will pray for Tracy’s safety; but if that may not be, better then we should die great-heartedly than live in the shadow of a treachery.”

Adelaide sprang to her feet. “And such is your love—” she cried scornfully, “cold—pale—the love of a coward. But I—verily, I would give my soul to save Tracy from one moment’s sorrow.”

She turned toward the door. Celia sprang after her.

“Laidie,” she cried sharply, “what are you going to do?”

“That which you dare not—you pale-hearted chit!” answered her sister furiously.

“Betray him? Laidie, you shall not. Be he the blackest traitor unhung you shall not soil your hands with his undoing.”

“Shall not! Who is to prevent me?”

“I will—if necessary I will warn him.”

“You—” Adelaide seized her sister’s hands in a vice. “Celia,” she said, in a low, fierce tone, “try to prevent me if you dare! Nay, you shall not dare! I will lock you up here till night-time, and not a servant shall come near you. Oh! I’ll have no warnings sent, I warrant you.”

Celia made no attempt to struggle in her sister’s grasp, but she lifted pleading eyes to hers. “Laidie,” she said softly, “mavourneen—you are cruel to me.”

Adelaide’s face softened suddenly. She put her arms round her sister, and stooped to kiss the pleading face.

“No, Celia,” she said resolutely, “I am kind. Tim Curtis must die, and you shall have no chance to prevent his death. For even were Tracy’s life not at stake, I would do this

to save you from a man whom all but you know to be a scoundrel.”

She turned suddenly and hastened from the room. Celia heard the lock click behind her. She was held prisoner.

For a moment she stood rigid where her sister had left her; then she sank into a seat by the harpsichord, and leaning her head on her arms broke into bitter weeping.

It was not her sister's severity nor the helplessness of her position that overwhelmed her, that turned her day to darkness and killed the joy in her heart. In her ears resounded again and again those parting words of Adelaide: “A man whom all but you know to be a scoundrel.”

All save herself! On the one side stood the assurance of her friends, Lord Pelham's assertion, Martha's accusation, proofs strong indeed. And on the other was only his denial and the cry of her own heart.

Ever since she had freed him at Charity Farm her belief in his honesty had grown. She had rested with such confidence on his promise to clear himself. After that magic hour she had made no further attempt to deny her love, but had given free rein to her dreams of happiness.

With her whole soul she loved him; he was the light of her life. And now the world stood between her and her love, and all her life was darkened. For her it was indeed the “Dark of the Moon.”

Bitterly she wept, her fair face hidden in the dear white hands, pink-tipped like apple blossoms; wept her heart out over her broken ideal.

At length she grew calmer. She sat up, brushed away her curls, and surveyed her future. No light dawned on her own trouble; but recollection stirred within her of other sorrows not so nearly her own.

She rose, and slowly paced the room. What could she do? Was there no way in which to help her sister? Adelaide had asked one thing of her, but that she could not perform. Even as she thought of it a horror of the proposed treachery shook her. Surely not for any man's life should a woman stoop to such a deed—luring a man on to destruction. Adelaide was indeed desperate to dream of such a crime. Better that Tracy should die a thousand times than that he win his life at the price of his wife's dishonour.

"Ah, no!—no!" she whispered, "she must not do it. I must plead with her again."

She ran to the door and then stopped. Too well she knew her sister's resolution, her utter devotion to Tracy's welfare; what word of hers could win the wife from what she deemed her husband's service?

"I must send him warning," she muttered desperately. "If—if indeed he be traitor perchance it were well he—he died. But—but not by Laidie's treachery. I must warn him."

She stood irresolute. It seemed impossible to let her sister commit this treachery, impossible to let the man she loved be lured to his death. And yet, if he were indeed the spy they called him, every hour he went free held danger for the conspirators. Could she deliberately endanger her brother's life by saving his enemy?

She pressed her hands to her brow with a little cry of despair. "Ah, God! why must I have this choice? For my love I will plead nothing, but between a sister's honour and a brother's life—ah, God! help me, for Christ's sake."

Her own words came back to her. "Better die heartedly than live in the shadow of a treachery." Surely, surely, honour is the one true guide through life—else

wherefore live? Yes, her path was clear. She must save her sister from this crime and leave the rest to God.

A sudden hope came to her. "I will warn him," she cried, "and then I will go to him and stoop to plead with him for Tracy's life. Perchance, if he indeed love me he will grant what I ask; if not—if not—and he still desire me—why, I am beautiful—it may be my hand in marriage will purchase what I crave."

She stood a moment silent. "I did not think I could wed a traitor," she said slowly, "yet if he be a traitor and ask that price—I will pay it."

Then a little smile brightened her eyes. "Perhaps—" she whispered very softly, "perhaps God may yet prove him a true man."

Her resolution was taken, but now she stood at pause how to carry it out. Adelaide must know nothing of the warning, and the difficulty of employing a servant to take her message in the teeth of her sister's watchful suspicion staggered her.

She tried the door; but the lock held firm. She ran to the window, which overlooked a small strip of garden behind the house, and peered down in the vain hope of escape in that direction. No chance offered. She drew back baffled, and sat down on the wide window seat to think out her plan.

The various noises of the street came up to her muffled by distance; but the house itself was very quiet. The silence worried her unstrung nerves; there was no sound audible save the loud tick of the landing clock, and—and—what was that other sound unnoted before in the agony of her struggle, but now clear, distinct in the stillness—that low, crooning song just below her window?

She leaned out and peered down through the closely inter-

twined branches of the elm tree at her right hand. Through the shimmer of the leaves she caught a glimmer of grey and gold and a black curly head. It was Adelaide's tiny black page—the little nine-year-old negro boy who carried her fan and salts when she walked abroad, and who was alternately spoiled and tormented by the household. No lady of fashion was without her black page, but Adelaide had small liking for the boy and used his services but lightly.

Celia's heart gave a leap of hope; here was the messenger she sought. She leaned further from the window: "Sam," she called softly, "Sam, what are you doing there?"

There was a quick rustle among the leaves, a dark face looked out at her doubtfully, evidently expecting rebuke, Celia put her fan to her lips to enjoin silence.

"Sam, be a good boy, and listen to me," she said brightly. "I want you to carry a message for me. 'Tis secret. Will you serve me?"

Sambo's eyes brightened. He nodded readily. "Yes, my lady," he said eagerly.

Celia hesitated. "Lady Wimbourne must not know of it. No one must see you leave the house. You must slip out when you can do so unobserved. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lady," answered the boy, preparing to climb down the tree.

"Wait, child, you have not learned my errand. Do you know where Mr. Curtis lodges in Boat-Stall Lane?"

"No, my lady," answered the boy stolidly.

"But you can find out?"

"No, my lady," he repeated.

"No! Why not, pray?"

"Not knowing Boat-Stall Lane. Not knowing Bath. Not

wanting to ask," answered the boy, with frightened eyes and lips trembling on the verge of tears.

"But cannot you adventure?" cried Celia desperately.

"No, my lady," he repeated obstinately.

Celia gave a cry of impatience. She knew the helplessness of this pampered little negro—one check or difficulty, and he would abandon his errand and resort to lies to escape punishment. It was useless to insist.

For a moment she was checked; then fresh inspiration came.

"Sam, listen. You know where Lady de Putren lives? 'Tis but four doors from here?"

The boy nodded, his face brightened.

"Take me a note to her house and I will give you a shilling."

"A shilling!" He held out his hand eagerly.

"No, no. You must take the note first. If it reach her safely before six o' the clock you shall have the money. You understand?"

She turned to the bureau and hastily wrote a line to Lucy de Putren.

"For pity's sake, Lucy, warn Mr. Curtis not to adventure to the Rooms to-night. There is a plot afoot for his undoing and I cannot get at him with my warning."

She sealed the note and dropped it down to the boy. It was a slender hope, but no other help offered. She gave the child a box of sweetmeats as earnest of further reward, and he slipped down the tree and disappeared into the house.

A few minutes later she heard steps approaching the door.

The key turned in the lock. Adelaide entered, followed by her maid.

“Do you feel recovered, Celia?” she asked, keeping up before the maid the fiction of ill-health she had rumoured below as the cause of her sister’s retirement.

“Perfectly, Laidie,” answered Celia gently. “I hope you will permit me to go to the Assembly.”

She feared her sister might refuse her request; but Adelaide agreed willingly. It was necessary that Celia should be at the Rooms to keep Timothy Curtis there until the appointed hour.

“Come and dress in my room to-night, as Tracy is away,” said Adelaide. Celia saw that she was to be given no opportunity for private speech with her maid, but she followed her sister without objection.

As they turned the corner of the stairs she looked back. She caught a vision of a small grey and gold figure slip through the hall door and dart down the steps, and her heart found a mite of comfort. If the letter reached Lucy de Putren, she knew her friend would not fail her; and if the message went astray she herself would be at the Rooms and free to use her wits to save Timothy from the threatening danger.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRIUMPH OF THE AWAKENING

TIMOTHY CURTIS took Rathborne's advice and kept house all Tuesday. He guessed shrewdly what would be the rage of the conspirators at the betrayal of their plot, and he had sufficient fear of their vengeance to determine him to avoid their company until Rathborne's return should clear him from all suspicion.

But the whereabouts of the stolen papers puzzled him greatly. Both Rory and Josiah Smith had denied all knowledge of them; it was clear that a third hand had been at work. Had the thief taken them to sell to the government or to hold as a threat over Tracy Wimbourne? In either case it was imperative that he be foiled. Timothy resolved not to hold himself quit of his task until he could return the papers safely to their owner.

It was late in the afternoon when a footman in the grey and gold liveries of the Wimbournes delivered a note at Timothy's lodging, instructing Simon to give it at once into the hands of his master. Tim opened it eagerly, smiling at the sentiment which moved him to keep the C. W. of the seal intact. The contents were brief.

"I must see you again. I give you my trust. Come to me at the Rooms to-night at the tea hour and I will give you what you have craved so long, if your forgiving pity can find pardon for my doubts. C. W."

Timothy read the note with a smile of happiness in his eyes. He folded it carefully and put it in his inner pocket

beside the bracelet he carried. His face was alight with triumph.

His love had conquered at last! She had obeyed her heart; without further assurance, against all her world, she had yielded him her trust. He prayed that he might prove worthy to hold it untarnished forever.

He dined alone, impatient for the appointed hour. Half way through dinner a letter was brought to him from Lucy de Putren. It was hurriedly scrawled, evidently in the midst of the lady's toilet, for it was plentifully besprinkled with powder.

"For Heaven's sake," it ran, "do not allow even Cupid himself to lead you to the Rooms to-night. There is a plot afoot for your undoing and disgrace. And you be not wholly crazy, keep house.

"Your well-wisher in truth,

"LUCY DE PUTREN."

Timothy read the hurried lines and his brow grew troubled. Lucy de Putren was not a woman to take unnecessary fright. It might well prove she had good reason for her warning. He could guess the temper of his opponents. For a moment he was almost moved (standing as he did within an ace of safety) to take the proffered advice and avoid danger until Rathborne's return. Prudence clearly urged him to this course. But prudence hath a homely face mightily unattractive. Tim took out Celia's letter and re-read it; he needed no further spur to his resolve. If she could find courage to trust him in face of all her world, he would let no fears hold him back from obedience to her call. Crazy it might be, but she should not find him lag-gard.

She had called him! Again the look of triumph lighted his eyes. With a laugh he tossed Lucy de Putren's note into the grate, and summoning Simon, proceeded to dress for the Assembly. Though all the ravens of Christendom croaked his doom, he would not turn from his path.

He arrived at the Rooms about nine o'clock without misadventure. The first person he encountered upon entering was Lucy de Putren herself. She started at sight of him, and, leaving her companion, crossed to his side.

"Mr. Curtis—you received my note? Are you clean crazed?"

He laughed lightly. "Do not hold me ingrate, madam. But I have matter of import to bring me here."

"Heaven grant no evil come of your madness then. There must be some stuff in the count of your danger, for Celia entreated me to warn you to keep house."

"Celia? Why, 'twas she herself bade me come here."

Lucy stared at him doubtfully. "If that be so, I understand nothing of the matter. It seems she has changed her mind. But be advised for once, Mr. Curtis. Go home."

Tim looked round the crowded rooms. His eyes encountered those of Roger Lee watching him suspiciously from a distant doorway. A sudden feeling of reckless defiance overmastered him.

"Go home? Not I, madam," he laughed. "A wise man will go to meet danger; if he run away he may be stabbed in the back."

"As well seek haste from a snail as wisdom from a lover," sighed Lucy. "Go your ways, wise man—Heaven protects her fools."

"Can you tell me where I am like to find Celia?" he asked. Lucy looked round and shook her head. "Lady Wim-

bourne turned faint ten minutes since and withdrew to the small card room. It is like enough Celia is with her."

He thanked her and turned to make his way through the crowd to the room indicated. His progress was slow, for the throng was great, and many stopped him to interchange greetings and news. It was fully ten minutes before he reached the door of the little card room. As he lifted the curtain to enter he encountered Lord Robert Dacre emerging with Celia on his arm.

Celia stopped dead at sight of him. Her face grew white to the lips. "Mr. Curtis! You here?" she faltered. "What brings you?"

Timothy looked at her with sudden suspicion dawning in his eyes. "Your note, madam; your note to me. You bade me come."

Celia stood silent, biting her lip in indecision, reluctant to betray her sister, hating the falsehood implied by her silence. Lord Robert intervened.

"The music has commenced, madam. We shall lose our place," he urged courteously.

Celia turned to Tim with sudden resolution. "Mr. Curtis, I—I wish to speak to you. Will you await me here until the dance is ended?"

"I am always at your service, madam," he answered.

Lord Robert hurried her away, leaving Tim staring after her with puzzled brows.

He turned and entered the card room. Adelaide was there alone, leaning back in a cushioned chair. She looked ghastly, but when he made a motion to withdraw she held out her hand quickly to prevent him.

"Stay—Mr. Curtis—I—I need your help."

With a look of concern Tim crossed quickly to her side.

"What can I do, Lady Wimbourne? Shall I call your sister? A glass of wine——"

"No, no," she cried impatiently. "My faintness has passed. I—pray sit down, Mr. Curtis—I—I can speak better so——"

Tim took a seat beside her, looking at her with puzzled brows. Adelaide did not meet his eyes. She sat, twisting her fingers nervously together and breathing quickly.

"Mr. Curtis——" she said at last, "do you hold it ever justifiable to take the life of a villain?"

Tim lifted his eyebrows. "Why, yes, madam, on occasion I take it a man holds his sword that he may clear the earth of vermin."

"Then if you knew a man deserving of death you would kill him?"

Timothy laughed. "Not quite so, madam. I'm no butcher. And 'tis no light undertaking to write any man down a thorough rascal. I take it few of us would cumber the earth long if we had our deserts."

"Yet if you knew a man to be a traitor, disloyal to friendship, false to his word, cruel to a woman—would you hold yourself justified in killing him then?"

He thought a moment. "Yes, madam," he answered slowly. "In fair fight and with no favour I'd do my best to rid the earth of such an one."

"In fair fight," she muttered. "Mr. Curtis—they say you are unmatched with the rapier."

Timothy flushed. "I—I've enjoyed rare occasion for practice, madam," he explained apologetically.

She nodded. "I need the help of such a sword as yours. Mr. Curtis, at half-past nine there will be waiting at the corner of the Orange Grove a man—even such a man as I

have described. He must be killed. Ah! wait—listen—” she cried quickly, as Tim started back with a gesture of repugnance. “This man is false, cruel. While he lives there can be no peace, no happiness for me in life, no safety for Tracy. His life shadows ours like a cloud, threatening every moment to whelm us in destruction. He has no pity, no remorse. Does not such an one deserve his death?”

Timothy hesitated. “Cannot you be more explicit, madam?” he urged. “I am at your service, but—’twould seem this is a matter rather for Tracy’s judgment.”

“Tracy! What can he do? He is not yet recovered from his accident. Moreover, as you know well, he is no swordsman.”

“Nevertheless, madam, I don’t hold he would relish my interference with his affairs.”

Adelaide sat upright, and put her hand on his arm. “Mr. Curtis—I’ll be frank with you. Tracy must know nothing of this affair. No man save you can give me the help I need. ’Twas for that reason I sent you that note, purporting to be from Celia, to draw you here to-night.”

Tim started. “You did that, madam?” he said slowly. The shadow of disappointment darkened his eyes. “Then Miss Winnington—”

“Knows nothing of the affair, and holds you still—as we all do—an enemy of the Jacobite cause. But whatever you may have done against that cause you have a ready sword arm, and can keep a silent tongue, and ’tis for those reasons I must have your help to-night. Ah! surely you cannot deny me. I am crazy for lack of hope, and should you fail me— Ah! ’tis but ten minutes to the trysting time, and if the villain die not to-night our lives must be darkened forever. Surely—surely you cannot deny me.”

Timothy eyed her in amazement. She looked almost distracted with fears. The whole affair was a mystery to him, but it seemed she was indeed in need of succour.

"You would have me go to the Orange Grove, meet this fellow, pick a quarrel with him and kill him?" he asked slowly; "is that your wish?"

"Yes, yes," she said eagerly; "you — you carry a sword."

"Not here, madam, but one is easily procurable at Simpson's. Are you sure the man will be there?"

"Yes. I—I was to have gone there, too, to meet him; but—I cannot."

"How should I know him?"

"He will be waiting in the shadow of that group of elms at the west corner of the grove. When you reach the place whistle—so—and he will come out to you."

Tim frowned. "'Tis a mighty distasteful affair," he muttered.

"Ah! But you will do it?" she pleaded.

"I do not know why I should, madam," he began slowly.

"Why—? Because I am a woman—and in trouble—and I ask your help."

He bowed. "I yield, Lady Wimbourne. I can't refuse you the use of my sword—if indeed you insist on the rascal's death. But—I cannot have any cut-throat work, you understand, madam. We must meet in fair fight. Will that satisfy you?"

"It is all I ask. Now go—go—I entreat you, or you will be too late."

Timothy hesitated. "I promised to meet your sister here when the dance is ended," he began slowly.

"I will explain your absence," said Adelaide readily.

“Come—come to St. James’s parade to-morrow morning. You shall talk with her then.”

He looked at her eagerly. “You permit that, Lady Wimbourne? Then I will delay no longer now.”

Without more words he left her, strode down the passage at the back of the Assembly Room, and so out of the side door on to the terrace. He was bitterly disappointed to find that Celia still apparently withheld her trust, but his present service fully occupied his thoughts; he would not waste time on regrets for what might not be.

Left alone, Adelaide Wimbourne sank back in her chair and pressed her hands to her forehead with a heavy sigh. She had succeeded in the task she had undertaken. Timothy Curtis had gone forth to the ambushade prepared for him; fifteen minutes more and he would be lying dead.

She had succeeded, her husband’s safety was secured, her anxieties on that head were ended, and now came the reaction.

As she sat in the brightly lighted little card room listening to the distant music of the dance, slowly the scene of the murder shaped itself in her mind. She saw, as in a vision, Timothy Curtis hurrying through the grove intent upon his errand to save her from despair. She saw him pause by the dark, many-branched clump of elms, heard him give the signal for his own destruction. She saw the lurking figures, the gleam of a dagger, the dull red stain crimsoning the white brocade. One low, choking groan broke the stillness—then fell that heavy silence which can never more be broken.

That awful, unbreakable silence! It was about her now, pressing her down, crushing her, forcing upon her fearful soul the realisation of the irretrievable nature of the deed

that she had done. 'Twas but the cessation of the dance-music, the closing of a door twixt her and the revellers, but the silence touched her unstrung nerves with a sudden uncontrollable horror. What had she done? Ah! what had she done?

Her resolution had served her while there was still need for her wit and resource, now that her work was over it failed. Her self-control vanished. A terror of the betrayal overwhelmed her. She had killed a man—killed him as surely as if she had herself borne the dagger, and now she was alone—alone—in a horror of death-like stillness.

The curtain over the doorway was lifted, Celia appeared in the entrance. With a scream, Adelaide sprang to her feet and pressed her hands over her eyes.

“Go away,” she cried, “go away— Do not look at me so. I—I have killed him.”

Celia's heart gave a great leap of fear, but her wit did not desert her. She turned quickly to Lord Robert, who was at her elbow.

“My sister is not well,” she said hurriedly; “will you ask Lady de Putren to come to me here?”

Lord Robert looked anxiously across at Adelaide. “Can I not assist you—” he began.

“No—no—'tis but an attack of hysteria. Lady de Putren and I will take her home if you will call a coach. Go quickly, I entreat you, sir.”

He could raise no further objection, but departed reluctantly in search of Lady de Putren. Celia crossed to Adelaide and put her hands firmly on her shoulders.

“Laidie,” she said, very quietly, “tell me what you have done.”

“I have sent Mr. Curtis to an ambuscade in the grove.

They will kill him," she moaned. Suddenly she dropped her hands and clung to Celia, her eyes wide with horror. "Celia—" she cried, "I have killed him—I—! All my days I must go through the world knowing that I have killed a man."

Celia's face was as white as her sister's, but her steadfast courage never failed her.

"No—no—Laidie," she said soothingly, "I will save him. God will help me to do it. There is yet time. But do you be quiet, darling; no one must hear of this, or we are indeed undone. I must go—go at once. Can I leave you? Can you be quiet—be brave?"

"Yes—yes—" cried Adelaide. "See—I am quiet now; I will be controlled. Only do you go and save him."

"When Lucy comes tell her you are faint—tell her I—have gone for wine. Ah! be brave, Laidie, or Heaven only knows what may befall us."

She dared wait no longer; horror of what might even now be passing in the shadowed grove shook her heart. She pushed her sister gently back into a chair, and ran down the passage and out into the darkness of the terrace walk.

When Lucy de Putren, escorted by Lord Robert, hurried into the small card room, she was shocked by the ghastliness of Adelaide's face. Her shrewd eyes divined at once that more than a simple fainting fit lay at the bottom of her friend's disturbance, but with ready tact she followed Adelaide's lead and administered salts and restoratives with devoted zeal, puzzling her wits to account for Celia's mysterious absence and Lord Robert's evident anxiety.

As for Lord Robert, he hovered over the couple with the most assiduous attentions, advancing ready excuse for every errand on which Lucy vainly endeavoured to despatch

him, evidently resolved not to leave the two women alone together.

A sound of voices echoed in the passage, a footman entered hurriedly and crossed to Lord Robert's side.

"My lord," he said softly, "Sir Tracy Wimbourne is at the outer door and wishes to speak with you on urgent affairs."

Adelaide sprang to her feet. "Tracy! Here!" she cried. "Ah! bring him to me. Why does he not come to me?"

"He is not powdered, my lady," began the footman.

"What does that matter? Bid him come in. Or I will go to him—" She stepped toward the door; Lucy laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Wait, Adelaide; he can come to you here, by the side door. Go—bring him in, Lord Robert."

Lord Robert hesitated, looking doubtfully at Adelaide. Lucy stamped her foot.

"Lud! my lord, you're monstrous tardy to-night. You fellow—" she added sharply, turning to the servant, "tell Sir Tracy Lady Wimbourne wishes his company here at once."

The footman departed. Lord Robert followed him to the door, hesitated, then turned and crossed to Adelaide's side.

"Madam," he whispered sharply, "keep the affair secret from your husband. 'Tis imperative he should not hear of it."

Lucy watched the whispering couple with curious eyes.

"My stars!" she muttered, "here's a mystery. It seems my company is no longer desired."

She was strongly tempted to stay and probe the mystery, but her kindly heart forbade such unnecessary prying. With a sigh of unsatisfied curiosity she slipped quietly

through the door and rejoined the company in the Assembly Room.

Neither Adelaide nor Lord Robert noted her departure. The latter continued to urge his wish.

"You understand, madam, Tracy must not be told. 'Tis his life or Curtis's. You will be silent."

"I do not know—" muttered Adelaide absently, her eyes fixed on the door. "Perchance he will——"

The curtain was raised. Tracy entered briskly, followed by Charles Rathborne. Both men were booted and spurred, and stained with the dust of the roads. With a cry of joy Adelaide sprang toward her husband.

"Tracy—Tracy— Ah! you have come at last!" She clung to him in a passion of weeping.

"Why, Heaven help us, Laidie, what's amiss?" cried Tracy in bewilderment, soothing her tenderly. "Have you been so fearful for my safety, Little Faint-heart?"

Marcus Ormonde and Oliver Shirley entered hurriedly. They stopped in amazement at sight of Adelaide and turned to leave the room. Tracy stopped them with a gesture.

"Wait! I sent for you here—? I must speak to you at once. Laidie, sweetheart, calm yourself. There is no more cause to fear now."

"Tracy—you don't know—Mr. Curtis——"

"Tim! What has happened to him?" He turned to the men. "Gentlemen, that is the gist of my business with you. We have done Tim a monstrous wrong. He is no spy—he is innocent."

Lord Robert started back with a cry. "Innocent! My God! Tracy—you are convinced?"

Charles and I have full proofs of his honesty. We will give them to you later. The true spy, the man who be-

trayed our plans, has met with his deserts. Tim Curtis is innocent of all injury to the cause."

Lord Robert jerked out his watch; he glanced at it and without another word dashed for the door, followed by Marcus Ormonde.

A long shuddering sigh broke from Adelaide's lips.

"Tracy," she cried hoarsely, "he's no traitor? And now—even now, they are killing him in the grove."

"Killing him? Whom? Tim Curtis? Adelaide—you are crazy."

"No—no—it is true. They are killing him, and I sent him there—to his death."

She sank into a chair and broke into bitter weeping. Tracy paid no heed to her. His face was white and set, his eyes terrible in their rage. "Is this true?" he asked, turning to Oliver Shirley.

Oliver shook his head, his face was very grave. "I knew nothing of it, but—Bob and Marcus must have gone to prevent it. Heaven grant they are in time."

Without a word Tracy strode out of the room. Oliver turned to follow, then he stopped and looked at Adelaide. He stood a moment irresolute, then crossed to her side.

"Madam," he said gently, "for pity's sake, madam, don't cry. Be comforted. Surely they will be in time."

She rose unsteadily to her feet. "Take me to them," she muttered, "take me to Tracy."

"Ah! no. Not yet. Wait here, madam, till he return."

"No—I must follow them. Celia is there."

"Celia!" His face flushed. She is there? Alone? You are right, madam, you must go to her. Do you wait here while I bring your cloak, then I will take you to seek her."

He hurried in search of her cloak. She stood by the door

white-faced, rigid, waiting in a frenzy of impatience for his return.

Meanwhile, Celia, her heart beating wildly with terror, hurried along the deserted terrace in the direction of the shadowed grove. The night was very dark, her thin sandals made no sound as she ran along the walk, none noted her passing. A little way beyond the entrance to the grove she paused, peering through the shadows, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound. She was trembling in every limb, her breath came in little frightened gasps. All was still save the tinkling of the fountain, the rustle of the leaves overhead. She ran further, bending her steps toward the thickest corner of the grove.

Again she paused to listen. Footsteps echoed behind her, crunching on the gravelled walk. She turned and saw a white figure moving toward her between the black trunks of the branching trees. Shaking with fear she drew back into the shadow and waited until he was abreast of her, then with a little cry of joy she sprang to his side.

"Mr. Curtis! Ah! thank Heaven, you are safe!"

He started back with an exclamation of amazement.

"Celia! you here! Great heavens!"

She caught his arm. "Ah! come away quickly—quickly," she whispered; "there is a plot to kill you here—an ambushade. Any moment they may be upon us."

"And you have come to warn me?" Alone?"

"Yes—yes. But, ah! don't tarry to question. Come away."

The sound of their whispering voices echoed through the stillness. A dark figure stole from behind a neighbouring elm and crept silently toward them, keeping in the shadow of the trees.

Tim stood looking down at the dim figure of the girl at his side. Again the smile of triumph shone in his eyes.

"Celia," he said softly, "you came to warn me? You give me your trust at last?"

"I—I came to save your life," she said quickly, pulling at his arm.

"Because you trust me?"

"Because I love you. And Adelaide—"

He gave a sigh of disappointment. "Celia, have I not yet won your trust?"

"Ah! come, come," she pleaded; "there is danger."

The lurking figure drew nearer, stealing silently across the grass.

Tim gave a low laugh. "Danger! What's that to me now? Your trust or your disbelief is life and death to me. If you cannot trust me, what's my life?"

"There—there are so many proofs," she answered, with a sob, reaching out vainly after her vanishing doubt.

"Proofs!" he cried bitterly. "Ay. And to-morrow I can give you proofs, assurances enough. But that's the world's way; I want your trust to-night, Celia."

The dark figure was quite close to them now, watching them from behind a gnarled branch.

Tim put his hand on hers and looked down at her bent head.

"Dearest—to-morrow I will woo you soberly, with full proof of my right to do so. But if you could find it in your heart to give me your whole trust to-night—taking my simple word against the world—the memory of this hour would be with us through our lives, making our love stronger, more perfect, knowing no more fears."

She gave a little sigh. "Dreams! dreams!" she whispered.

"Yes, dear, and 'twas you who taught me it takes courage to dream."

Bowing her head, she laid her cheek against his hand. "No," she whispered, "this is no dream. I have been asleep this long time, but this is the awakening. I love you—I love you. I give you my trust forever."

He put his arm about her and stooped to kiss her face. A link-boy passing outside the grove flashed the light through the trees. Tim looked up. He saw a man standing a few paces from him with something shining in his uplifted hand. With a shout he pushed Celia back and sprang away from her side. The man leaped on him, stabbing twice fiercely at his heart. Tim sank to his knees with a muffled cry.

An answering shot came from the edge of the grove, footsteps ran along the gravel path. The assassin turned and slunk away through the trees, grasping in his hand the hilt of a broken dagger.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MOON STOOPS

WHEN Lord Robert and Marcus Ormonde reached the spot they found Tim kneeling in the centre of the path, holding the prostrate figure of Celia in his arms. He looked up at them with a dazed expression.

"She has swooned," he muttered. "Bring some water quickly."

Lord Robert turned and ran toward the fountain. Marcus put his hand on Tim's shoulder.

"Are you wounded, man?" he asked anxiously.

Tim shook off his hand. "Let me be," he said surlily. "You can take my sword, I'll not escape you, but let me be till she is in safety."

Marcus drew back with a flushed face. Lord Robert returned with his hat full of water, just as Tracy and Charles Rathborne arrived on the scene.

Tim bathed Celia's temples, and presently she opened her eyes and looked round on the group of men, first with amazement, then with a sudden fearful recollection. Her eyes met Tracy's. She sat up and put her hand on Tim's arm.

"Tracy," she said resolutely, "you shall not harm Mr. Curtis. He is my betrothed."

"And my friend, Celia," said Tracy softly, "if he can find pardon for distrust."

Tim looked up. He recognised Charles Rathborne, and a look of enlightenment crossed his face. He held out his hand to Tracy.

"You blind bat!" he said, with a low laugh. "But, Tracy, my dear fellow—where the mischief are these papers there's such a pothor about?"

Tracy's face darkened. "I would to Heaven I knew," he muttered. "They must be found."

Celia rose to her feet; she was white and shaken. Lord Robert looked across at her.

"Bring Miss Winnington into my lodging," he said quickly, "'tis convenient, and I will call a coach."

Tim put his arm jealously round Celia, but made no objection to the proposal. They followed Lord Robert down the grove.

At the entrance to the walks they met Adelaide and Oliver Shirley. The whole party turned together into Lord Robert's house and went up to his library. There Adelaide drew Tracy aside into the embrasure of a window, eager to make confession of the betrayal that weighed on her conscience.

Timothy put Celia gently into a chair; then he turned and faced the men with a queer look in his eyes.

For a minute they eyed each other in silence, their faces flushed with embarrassment, then Tim broke into a hearty laugh.

"You demmed fools!" he said affectionately.

He shook hands with Marcus and Oliver, but Lord Robert hesitated.

"I count my actions justified under the circumstances," he said resolutely. "I would do the same again did his Highness's service demand it."

Tim put his hand on his shoulder. "I don't doubt it, Bob," he said gravely, "the Stuart is to be envied his servants."

"Are you touched, Tim?" asked Marcus anxiously, pointing to a crimson stain on the other's sleeve.

"Only a scratch on the wrist. Something turned the dagger and broke the blade." As Tim spoke he put his hand inside his coat and from his inner pocket drew out the bracelet Celia had given to him. He held it out to her with a smile. "'Twas this saved me."

She took it with a little shudder and turned it over to examine it. The blade of the dagger had twisted and broken it, piercing in places the gold scroll-work. Oliver Shirley leaned over her shoulder and looked at it curiously.

"'Twas not the gold that turned the blade," he said, "but the paper between. It is padded with rolls of parchment."

"So it is," said Celia wonderingly. "I never noted that before."

She bent wide one of the cracks in the gold and prised out the roll stuffed inside. The men watched with interest while she unfolded it and spread out the closely written sheets of paper.

Oliver drew in his breath suddenly with a sharp, hissing sound. He picked up one of the papers, glanced at it and passed it on to Lord Robert.

"Bob," he said sharply, "do you see what this is?"

Lord Robert took the paper. Marcus leaned over his shoulder; they read it together. Marcus gave a cry of surprise:

"What the mischief! Tim—these are Tracy's missing papers."

Lord Robert looked up at Tim with questioning glance.

"These papers have been stolen," he said significantly; "how did they come into your possession, Curtis?"

Tim stared at them in bewilderment. "On my honour, I

have not the dimmest understanding of the affair. Are those the papers that caused all the mischief?"

"Yes—and they are now found in your possession," said Lord Robert quietly. "What's the explanation?"

Tim made no answer. He stood looking across at Celia with a shadow of anxiety in his eyes.

"Come, Tim, explain," urged Marcus impatiently.

Celia lifted her head and looked at Tim with a little smile of confidence. "Mr. Curtis tells us he knows nothing of the matter," she said with dignity. "We can trust his word."

A smile of triumph lighted his eyes. He threw back his shoulders with a gesture of relief and turned briskly to examine the bracelet.

"It's demmed queer," he muttered; "did you know the bracelet held aught, madam?"

Celia shook her head. "No. I knew it was intended to hold private papers. 'Twill open, but—" she stopped suddenly, a look of enlightenment crossed her face.

"Laidie," she cried sharply, "come here."

Tracy and Adelaide turned at her call. Adelaide looked from the papers to the battered bracelet, and with a cry fell on her knees by Celia's side.

"Celie! Who gave you this?"

"Rory did. Why, Laidie, you know, you have one, too."

"But this is mine—mine?"

"No, it is not," answered Celia firmly; "you are always mistaking them, Laidie; yours differs in the chasing. You took mine once before, but I took it away again."

"You took it? When was that?"

"That morning you slept so late, when we were journeying here. You took mine and wore it all night seemingly.

I was tetchy with you for always mistaking them, so I took it from your arm without wakening you and put back your own in place of it."

"You never told me."

"I thought no more of it till this moment. I did not know you carried anything of value inside it, least of all Tracy's papers. It seems 'twas I who robbed her, Tracy."

"And I who received the stolen goods," said Tim, with a laugh, "and have carried them, unwittingly, for two weeks. It would seem I owe you apologies, gentlemen!"

Adelaide rose to her feet and turned to Timothy, her face was very white. "Mr. Curtis—" she faltered, "I——"

Tim put out his hand and stopped her. "Madam," he said gently, "we have been the playthings of the Fates. Now that the game is ended let us forget what antics they forced us to perform."

Tracy gathered up the papers with a sigh of relief. "Thank Heaven, I have my hand on them at last," he muttered: "Tim—you'll keep a silent tongue?"

"That I will. 'Tis no concern of mine. And to be honest with you—" he added with a laugh, "I'm demmed glad to be quit o' the affair with accident."

Lord Robert laughed, and crossing to the fireplace pulled the bell-rope. "What say you to a trifle of supper?" he suggested. "Come into the inner room and see what my rascal can do for us."

"Supper by all means," cried Tracy. "I've ridden twelve miles since I dined."

He took Adelaide's arm and with a significant glance from Tim to Celia led the way from the room. The other men looked across at Tim with a nod and smile and followed

suit pell-mell, leaving him alone with Celia. It was their atonement not to begrudge his happiness.

The door closed very gently. Tim turned and looked at Celia with the joy of anticipation shining in his eyes.

She sat with sweetly blushing face and eyes demurely lowered to the clasped white hands, pink-tipped like apple blossoms; the shadow of a mile played round the rosy curve of her lips.

Timothy crossed to her side.

"Mistress Celia," he said with a plaintive sigh, "I have vowed to you that I will only wed where I can love. Must I then live a bachelor all my days?"

She lifted her eyes to his. There was utter trust in her look, and the deep mystery of joy, and a little homely laughter to hold her down to earth.

"In truth, Mr. Curtis," she said demurely, "I have ever heard that the estate of bachelorhood is blessed with a holy freedom from cares."

Timothy knelt beside her and looked up into her face; his voice was deep with tenderness.

"Alack!" he sighed, "the moon is so cold, so still, so distant. How may a man dare to reach up to the far heavens and steal her glories?"

The crimson deepened on her cheek, the smile brightened in her eyes; but she made no answer.

Timothy drew nearer. His eyes glowed with an eager light as he watched her face.

"Celia," he whispered, softly, "if the moon were to stoop—"

He paused, expectant. With a soft laugh of happiness, Celia placed her hands on his shoulders and, stooping, kissed his lips.

A sudden burst of sound came from the inner room, laughter and the clinking of glasses. Marcus Ormonde's voice rose clear above the hubbub:

"Gentlemen—a toast—a toast—"Long Life to the Moon of Bath and good speed to Endymion Curtis."

THE END

